

# Mears Learning Limited

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1276434

**Name of lead inspector:** Ken Merry, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Inspection date(s):** 11–12 April 2018

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of a series of monitoring visits to a sample of new apprenticeship training providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy. Ofsted's intention to carry out monitoring visits to these new providers was first announced by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in November 2017. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

Mears Learning Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of Mears Group PLC. The company is an independent training provider and offers a range of apprenticeships in business and construction-related subjects. In May 2017, Mears Learning Limited became a prime contract holder. The provider currently has 53 apprentices funded through the apprenticeship levy, of whom 36 are enrolled on standards-based programmes in leadership and management, four on standards-based programmes in gas engineering, and 13 on construction building frameworks. While Mears Learning Limited has future plans to offer apprenticeship training to other companies, at the time of this monitoring visit all apprentices were employees of Mears Group PLC.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?**

#### **Insufficient progress**

Leaders' self-assessment of the quality of provision and their quality improvement planning are not sufficiently evaluative. The self-assessment report does not identify areas of weakness well enough, and actions in the quality improvement plan are not specific enough. As a result, improvements to the quality of provision are too slow.

Leaders do not take enough action to improve the practice of teaching staff. They produce action plans for tutors and assessors that reflect the areas for improvement that they identify when they observe teaching and training. However, too many of the improvement actions have not been taken by teaching staff. As a result, the work that leaders are doing to improve the quality of provision is not having enough impact on apprentices' progress.

Systems to monitor the apprentices' progress are underdeveloped, which means that assessors are not able to monitor well enough the progress that apprentices are making towards completing their programme. In too many cases, the direct line managers of apprentices do not take enough responsibility for progress reviews or for setting targets for apprentices. As a result, leaders and managers are unable to identify when apprentices are falling behind in their studies and do not intervene quickly enough to provide support.

Leaders and managers have a clear and carefully devised strategy for the apprenticeships that they offer, with all current apprentices being employees of Mears Group PLC. They offer apprenticeships in vocational areas where they are confident that they have the skills, experience and expertise in place to deliver well. They continue to use other providers to deliver apprenticeships in vocational areas where they do not have sufficient expertise.

Leaders ensure that programmes meet the requirements of an apprenticeship and that apprentices receive their entitlement to on- and off-the-job training. Apprentices on construction programmes take part in frequent off-the-job training and management apprentices attend monthly workshops and carry out a range of activities that enhance their learning. However, leaders do not record well enough the activities that management apprentices complete.

Leaders have made a significant investment in a state-of-the-art construction training centre that enables apprentices to learn industry techniques. Teachers and assessors are well qualified and all have relevant industry experience.

Recruiting managers and human resources staff provide clear and helpful advice and guidance prior to apprentices starting on programmes. As apprentices on construction programmes approach the end of their planned studies, most receive appropriate advice and guidance about their next steps, which for most is to continue working in specialised trades; almost all apprentices have permanent contracts from the start of their employment. However, advice and guidance for the more ambitious construction apprentices is not provided early enough in their programme to help them to plan out their intended career path within the construction industry.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Reasonable progress**

Apprentices develop vocational skills well in their job roles and at the provider's training centre; this is particularly the case on construction programmes. For example, joinery apprentices are able to participate fully in house-refurbishment projects. Management apprentices develop the skills and knowledge that help them to become more valuable to the business. However, the progress that construction apprentices make in developing their theoretical understanding is less strong; in too many theory sessions, teachers answer their own questions and do not check apprentices' understanding of theoretical concepts well enough.

Teachers and assessors provide effective support to develop the personal, social and communication skills that apprentices need to complete their jobs well. For example, construction apprentices communicate effectively with colleagues and customers. Management apprentices develop an improved understanding of emotional

intelligence and are more aware of the well-being of their colleagues when completing tasks.

Apprentices develop their mathematics skills well. Construction apprentices can complete calculations related to their job roles such as ordering the correct volume of supplies and estimating the cost of jobs with accuracy. Apprentices on management programmes produce bids for funding that demonstrate accurate costing for the projects.

Too many apprentices do not develop their written English skills well enough. Apprentices' work is assessed frequently but assessors do not identify or correct technical terminology that has been misspelled or incorrectly used. As a result, apprentices often repeat mistakes in their written work.

**How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress**

Leaders have introduced effective systems and processes to ensure that apprentices stay safe.

The designated safeguarding officer and deputy safeguarding officer are well trained and maintain detailed records of any safeguarding concerns. Relationships with local support agencies are in place and these support vulnerable apprentices well. For apprentices who do not live close to the provider's main site, the designated safeguarding officer contacts support services in their home areas to ensure that these apprentices receive good support where necessary.

Leaders keep suitable records of the checks that they complete before they appoint individuals to work for them in a training or assessing capacity; this includes Disclosure and Barring Service checks. All members of staff have completed appropriate training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Construction apprentices know how to keep themselves safe when working in hazardous environments. They understand how to use potentially dangerous equipment correctly and work safely when in workshops and on building sites. Leaders ensure that they display up-to-date risk assessments outside all workshops in the training centre; staff and apprentices comply with the relevant safety controls.

Leaders have produced a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan. However, they do not identify well enough potential threats and issues that are specific to their business. Apprentices have a general awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism but their knowledge in relation to their workplace is underdeveloped.

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