

Watertrain Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

14–16 January 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of directorship and management	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for apprentices	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet of a consistently high standard across the company.
- Learning and development coaches do not use the assessment of apprentices' starting points to plan individual learning. Consequently, the most able apprentices do not make progress at the rate of which they are capable.
- Progress reviews are not effective. They do not routinely involve employers or set challenging enough targets.
- A small minority of apprentices make slow progress on their course.
- The directors' self-assessment report lacks rigour, evaluation and accurate judgements. Actions in the associated action plan are not precise enough to enable directors to measure the progress made or to put in place quickly additional actions when needed.
- Operational directors do not use data well enough to monitor the performance of different groups of apprentices and to inform their self-assessment.

The provider has the following strengths

- The managing directors and operational directors have taken very seriously the areas of concern identified at the monitoring visit. They have made significant changes in the way they manage apprenticeships that are starting to have a positive impact on the standards of apprenticeship programmes.
- Directors and managers have recently put in place a more rigorous observation process and are using the outcomes to inform staff development.
- Apprentices develop the knowledge they need to better understand the roles they perform and to prepare them well for future advancement.
- Directors and managers establish strong partnerships with employers. They develop the curriculum to meet the local, regional and national needs of the water sector successfully.
- Apprentices develop their English, information and communication technology (ICT) and mathematics functional skills well. The proportion of apprentices who achieve functional skills qualifications in these subjects is high.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Watertrain was formed in 2007 as part of a larger training organisation. The managing director established Watertrain Limited in 2010 as a stand-alone training provider in partnership with a further education college. In 2013, the managing director and operations director bought out the college.
- In July 2017, Watertrain started training apprentices funded through the apprenticeship levy for a large water company. Watertrain currently provides training for 193 apprentices. All apprentices are studying at level 3. More than three quarters are on water process technician standards apprenticeships and the rest are enrolled on apprenticeship frameworks for the water industry. The provider works with several large employers, based in Yorkshire, Northumbria, Bristol, the south east and Portsmouth.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Quality managers should ensure that when lessons are identified as requiring improvement they monitor that the training and development provided improve teachers' practice quickly.
- Learning and development coaches should use the information they collect of apprentices' existing skills and knowledge to plan challenging individual programmes.
- Learning and development coaches should involve employers in the review of their apprentices' progress and set apprentices clear and challenging targets, so that they make the progress of which they are capable in relation to their starting points.
- Directors should ensure that all employers understand the importance of releasing apprentices for coaching and assessment sessions, so that they make the progress expected of them and do not fall behind.
- Directors should ensure that the self-assessment process is rigorous and clearly identifies what needs to improve using the information available. The associated action plan should set clear and measurable targets against which the board of directors can monitor progress accurately.
- Directors should ensure that they monitor the progress of apprentices by age, gender, race and disability, so they can identify any groups who do not progress as well as others.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- A few areas identified at the monitoring visit still require improvement. For example, the information that learning and development coaches collect about existing skills is still not used effectively to plan individual programmes. Apprentices' reviews do not routinely involve employers, and the targets they are set are often too easy.
- The directors' self-assessment report lacks rigour and evaluation. The judgements made about leadership and management and outcomes are inaccurate. The action plan is not precise enough to enable directors and managers to measure the progress made in improving quality or to put in place quickly further actions when needed.
- Current apprentices do not benefit from impartial advice and guidance. This results in a small minority of apprentices being placed on inappropriate courses. Directors have recently worked with employers to revise the recruitment and induction procedures to make them more rigorous and to ensure that apprentices fully understand what their programme involves. Due to the restriction on recruitment this new process is not yet in place.
- The managing directors and operational directors have taken very seriously the areas of concern identified at the monitoring visit. They have made significant changes in the way they manage apprenticeships, which are starting to have a positive impact on the quality of apprentices' training. For example, all apprentices now benefit from off-the-job training. Consequently, apprentices gain new knowledge and a better understanding of the sector they work in.
- Directors recognise in their self-assessment report that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet of a consistently high standard. The vast majority of apprentices now receive sufficient off-the-job training; however, the quality of this training requires improvement.
- The strategies directors have implemented are starting to result in improvements to the practice of individual learning and development coaches. For example, apprentices now have a good understanding of British values and safeguarding following the training that development coaches received.
- The newly established operational directors rigorously monitor the progress that apprentices make on their programmes. They identify and report any slow progress to the newly established board of directors. Operational directors and quality managers swiftly identify apprentices who make slow progress or those who are at risk of not completing on time. Operational directors discuss any concerns with individual employers and agree actions to help them catch up. A small minority of employers cancel sessions because of business pressures. This results in apprentices not receiving their planned training and assessment sessions, which has a negative impact on their progress.
- Operational directors identified accurately that one employer did not provide sufficient off-the-job training. They rectified this by allocating additional resources so that apprentices now benefit from planned off-the-job training and additional coaching to help them catch up.
- Operational directors have recently put in place a more rigorous observation process.

They have established a series of focused teaching and learning professional development workshops and individual coaching and mentoring sessions, for example in the 'Prevent' duty, radicalisation and extremism. Inspectors assessed that apprentices now have a good understanding of these topics and how they apply in the water industry.

- Managing directors establish strong partnerships with employers in the sector. They develop and plan the curriculum with employers to meet the local, regional and national needs of the water industry successfully. As a result, apprentices benefit from courses that develop the knowledge and skills they need for work. Senior directors plan to introduce level 2 and level 4 apprenticeships, which will provide a greater range of progression routes.
- Operational directors consider the workload and experience of their employees when allocating apprentices to them. Staff are valued by their managers and appreciate the staff development and training they receive.

The governance of the provider

- The managing directors have taken effective action to improve the oversight and scrutiny of the quality of apprenticeships. They set headline targets for the operational directors and monitor these carefully.
- The managing directors now receive accurate reports on the progress of apprentices and the quality of teaching and learning, and they challenge the operational directors where there are concerns.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Operational directors have established effective arrangements with external agencies such as mental health services, general practitioners and the local authority. They refer apprentices to these agencies appropriately and promptly, and provide good support to apprentices to maintain their well-being.
- The designated safeguarding officer is the quality assurance director, assisted by the operational director. Both directors, as well as the managing director, have benefited from appropriate training. Operational directors ensure that all new staff complete the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. All staff undertake appropriate safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training.
- Staff report effectively, and in a timely manner, any safeguarding concerns, which the safeguarding team follows up promptly. Operational directors have in place a suitable 'Prevent' duty risk register and action plan.
- Apprentices feel safe and have a good understanding of how to recognise the signs associated with radicalisation and extremism and how it applies in the water industry. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of how to work safely and they observe the regulations that are in place in water processing plants.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- A small minority of apprentices already have considerable experience in their job role. Learning and development coaches do not take these into account when planning challenging activities to develop apprentices' vocational skills further. Consequently, the more experienced apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learning and development coaches do not review apprentices' progress well enough. They do not sufficiently challenge apprentices to enhance their skills further. Learning and development coaches do not review the actions they set and ensure that apprentices complete them. In too many instances, employers are not involved in the review process, which hinders their apprentices' progress.
- Learning and development coaches do not help apprentices to make good progress because some sessions are delivered at too slow a pace. Learning and development coaches in these sessions do not check the levels of understanding of apprentices and they often do not allow sufficient time for apprentices to reflect and give a considered answer.
- Observers accurately identify strengths and areas for development during lesson observations. However, managers do not monitor action plans well enough to ensure that improvement takes place quickly. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the company is not of a consistently high standard.
- Learning and development coaches ensure that individual learning plans include apprentices' self-evaluation of their current levels of knowledge and understanding against the standards. However, they do not use this information well enough to plan personalised programmes that take account of prior learning and attainment. Most apprentices follow the same programme, irrespective of their prior knowledge, skills and experience levels, which means the more experienced make slow progress.
- Apprentices benefit from planned off-the-job training which results in them gaining new knowledge and better understanding of the processes and job roles they complete at work. Apprentices recognise that this provides them with increased career opportunities within their company. The new knowledge they gain results in apprentices taking on greater responsibilities in the workplace. For example, apprentices have a good understanding of coagulation and filtration plants and how to rectify a water mains leak.
- Learning and development coaches have good occupational knowledge of the water industry and use this to good effect to promote effective learning and understanding. For example, when teaching the mathematics unit, they use relevant examples, such as measuring the water flow, so that apprentices understand better how to use mathematical theory to solve practical problems.
- Apprentices with supervisory responsibilities develop new knowledge and skills in relation to how they manage customers effectively. Apprentices benefit from these skills and understand how it improves their performance at work. For example, apprentices deal well with irate customers when they attend water mains breakdowns. Employers value the new skills they gain in supervising staff effectively.
- Learning and development coaches work cooperatively with employers to ensure that apprentices who are at risk of falling behind receive additional support to help them catch up.
- Learning and development coaches ensure that apprentices can gain new skills and

knowledge through effective planning with employers. For example, several apprentices were unable to learn skills in 'activated sludge' since this is a specialist process and not carried out at their workplaces. Consequently, employers organised temporary transfers to other workplaces, which meant apprentices could gain the knowledge and skills needed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices demonstrate the behaviours that employers in the water sector expect of them. For example, they are able to adjust their approach to different situations, such as dealing very effectively with customers when informing them of potential disruption in service to minimise any potential complaints.
- Apprentices have a positive attitude towards their learning and their apprenticeship. Consequently, attendance at work and in off-the-job training sessions is high. Apprentices are rightly proud of the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they develop.
- Apprentices demonstrate high levels of confidence in the work they are now able to carry out. For example, apprentices confidently produce reports with graphs and charts using Excel spreadsheets. Employers value this because it results in greater productivity.
- Apprentices are safe, feel safe and know to whom they should report any concerns they may have. Apprentices can explain the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and how these apply when working in the water sector. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety in the workplace. For example, they understand the risk of contaminated water spreading infection and disease.
- Apprentices develop the English skills they need for work. For example, apprentices develop their oral communication skills, which help them deal effectively with other colleagues or customers.
- Apprentices develop further their existing knowledge and skills in mathematics through the inclusion of a mathematics and science module as part of their apprenticeship programme. This results in a better understanding of how to solve problems; for example, apprentices can calculate accurately the average rate of the filtration cycle and assess if the process is running at the correct pace.
- Apprentices develop a good understanding of British values. They can identify the importance of rule of law, mutual respect and tolerance, and how this applies at work. Staff at Watertrain and employers promote British values effectively and support all employees through training and development.
- Attendance is too low for a small minority of apprentices in coaching sessions or reviews with their learning and development coach. This is often due to the pressures of work and employers being unable to release them. Learning and development coaches provide additional sessions to help them catch up.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Around a quarter of apprentices make slow progress on their apprenticeship. This is partly due to staff shortages or business pressures at employers that result in apprentices

missing coaching and assessment sessions.

- A small minority of apprentices have existing skills when they start the programme. Learning and development coaches do not take this into account when they plan learning, which means a few apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- While operational directors monitor the progress of individual apprentices, they do not analyse the progress of the different groups of apprentices. Consequently, they are not aware of, and do not put in place actions to improve the gap in achievement between different groups of apprentices. Around half of current apprentices who have a learning disability make slow progress.
- The proportion of apprentices who remain on their course currently is high.
- Directors, managers and staff place a high priority on the development of apprentices' English, ICT and mathematics functional skills. Apprentices value the new skills they learn and how they can apply these at work and in their lives. For example, apprentices who gained a pay rise were able to work out the back pay they would receive.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve functional skills qualifications in English, mathematics and ICT is high.
- The great majority of apprentices make good progress in developing the practical skills they need for work. For example, apprentices can identify and rectify problems that cause, or may cause delays in water processing plants.
- The vast majority of apprentices continue in employment, with a small number who gain promotion or take on additional responsibility. Apprentices develop the knowledge they need to better understand the roles they perform and that prepares them well for future advancement.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1276425
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of apprentices	19+
Approximate number of all apprentices over the previous full contract year	211
Principal/CEO	Neil Davies
Telephone number	03330 431430
Website	www.watertrain.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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of apprentices (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	193	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	193	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of apprentices aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of apprentices for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality assurance director as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices, employers and staff; 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

Andrea Machell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Bob Busby	Ofsted Inspector
Graham Cunningham	Ofsted Inspector

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