

PeoplePlus Group Limited

Monitoring visit report

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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 a result of desk-based analysis and identified risks. PeoplePlus Group Limited was inspected in July 2017 and was judged to be good. Since then, the provider has experienced significant growth. The senior management structure has changed. Senior leaders have increased the proportion of provision for learners and apprentices that subcontractors deliver. The provider has grown the provision overall, but the major growth in apprenticeships is because of the acquisition of Learndirect Apprenticeships in July 2018.

PeoplePlus Group Limited is a national independent learning provider, owned by Staffline Group Plc, that delivers adult education and apprenticeship programmes, including to employers paying the apprenticeship levy. The provider supports around 20,000 adult learners across a range of locations nationally. Subcontracted partners work with around two thirds of these learners. Of the 3,900 apprentices, around two thirds are on standards-based programmes and the remainder follow framework programmes. Approximately two thirds of apprentices are on programmes at level 2, and a quarter at level 3. The largest vocational area is retail and commercial enterprise, which has over half of all the apprentices. Business, administration and law is the second largest vocational area, with around a quarter of apprentices. A small number of apprentices are on programmes in health, public services and care, and in engineering and manufacturing technologies.

Themes

What progress have governors and senior leaders made to ensure that learners and apprentices receive high-quality education and training across the range of the directly delivered and subcontracted provision? Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, the senior leadership team has undergone significant change. The provider recently acquired a very large apprenticeship business which had its apprentices in all parts of the country. Senior leaders from this business have transferred to the PeoplePlus group to support this rapid growth and strengthen the expertise within the wider senior team.

Senior leaders have a clear strategic plan to provide high-quality learning to adults and apprentices. They have developed significant relationships with national employers and local authorities to identify local and regional skills gaps. In collaboration with these employers, they have planned appropriate curriculum to help learners and apprentices develop the necessary skills to meet their employers' needs. For example, leaders have created programmes to help adults who are unemployed learn the customer service and retail skills required for employment with

a national grocer. As a result, adult learners achieve well, with a high proportion developing new skills and confidence to move on to employment or further learning.

Leaders have managed subcontracted provision effectively. They have consolidated provision by working only with partners who have the additional skills and resources that improve adult learners' and apprentices' experiences. Leaders have acted swiftly to cut poorly performing subcontracted apprenticeship provision.

Senior leaders have invested significantly in online systems to ensure that leaders, managers, and employers have sufficient information to monitor closely the progress of their learners and apprentices. Leaders use this information well to identify those who are at risk of falling behind in their learning. They use a range of indicators to signal potential issues. These include apprentices' attendance at learning sessions as part of their off-the-job training, and their progress towards achieving elements of their programmes. As a result, leaders are able to hold managers swiftly to account, and ensure that apprentices receive the support necessary to achieve their qualifications. The provider's data shows that the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications in the time allocated is increasing rapidly.

Although leaders have comprehensive information about apprentices' current achievements, they do not know well enough whether apprentices will achieve the grades of which they are capable. Consequently, they are unable to ensure that all apprentices receive the support necessary for them to achieve their best.

Leaders' self-assessment of their progress is broadly accurate. Leaders identify appropriate actions to improve provision and communicate these clearly to managers. They monitor closely the impact of these actions through the rigorous analysis of performance data. As a result, improvements are evident across most performance indicators, such as the proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications in the time allocated. However, leaders accept that actions to ensure that apprentices achieve their potential are not sufficiently precise.

Leaders provide managers and coaches with the appropriate support to improve their practice. Coaches receive relevant training to improve their teaching and coaching skills, so that apprentices receive the feedback necessary to make at least the progress expected. However, a significant minority of coaches do not provide apprentices with sufficiently precise feedback or targets to help them to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Senior leaders have ensured that appropriate governance arrangements are in place to hold leaders and managers to account. They have recently formed a quality board, in addition to the provider's parent company board, to provide sufficient external scrutiny. Senior leaders have recruited experienced educationalists from the post-16 sector to provide insight and challenge to scrutinise their actions. However, it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of the new board.

What progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that coaches use information about apprentices' progress effectively, so that they achieve according to their potential and in the time allocated? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have supported coaches effectively, so that apprentices make at least the progress expected of them. Apprentices receive a comprehensive assessment of their starting points. Coaches ensure that they have a good understanding of apprentices' English and mathematical skills needs. Apprentices who do not have the required level in these subjects receive the appropriate training to achieve these qualifications. However, for those apprentices who have exemptions from mathematics and English, too few have opportunities to extend their technical knowledge or numerical skills within the workplace.

Apprentices undertake a thorough pre-enrolment skills check to identify what they know and can do. Coaches use this information well to ensure that all apprentices follow the right programme at the right level, so that they develop the new skills, knowledge and behaviours required by their employers.

Most coaches plan learning to help apprentices develop their skills, knowledge and behaviours well, over time. For example, coaches who work with a national blue-chip company plan on- and off-the-job training very well, so that apprentices make very good progress. They adapt learning activities to link closely to apprentices' current work. Retail apprentices are able to 'think outside of the box' and apply principles of sustainability in the food sector to their roles in fashion departments. They develop significantly their understanding of waste and the impact on the wider environment.

Coaches assess apprentices' work and reflective logs routinely. They provide apprentices with helpful feedback to help them to improve their work. As a result, most apprentices make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. In the current year, most apprentices achieve their qualifications in the time allocated. However, a significant minority of coaches do not provide apprentices with sufficiently specific and challenging targets and activities to enable them to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Most coaches monitor carefully apprentices' progress towards completing their qualifications. They review, in depth, apprentices' progress towards various modules, tasks and assignments to ensure that they are on track to achieve. In most cases, employers contribute to apprentices' reviews by providing useful feedback on apprentices' progress in the workplace. Additionally, coaches ensure that apprentices undertake sufficient off-the-job training to support their programmes, and record this accurately. Consequently, most apprentices know their progress and targets for improvement. However, in a few cases, coaches fail to monitor accurately apprentices' activities. As a result, these apprentices are unclear about their tasks and the due date for completing assignments. This slows their progress.

Apprentices who fall behind in their work receive the appropriate support to help them get back on track with their learning. For example, apprentices who consider a break in learning work closely with their coach and line manager to identify specific interventions, such as additional one-to-one sessions and counselling, to help them remain at work. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who take a break in their learning is decreasing rapidly.

Most apprentices receive effective support to help them prepare for their end-point assessments. They undertake a range of activities including presentations and mock exams that boost their confidence, help to deepen their learning and enable them to practise the skills necessary to achieve their assessments.

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