

Blue Arrow Limited

Independent Learning Provider

Inspection dates

12–15 February 2019

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too few apprentices achieve their apprenticeship within planned timescales.
- Senior executives have been slow to remedy the poor performance of the provision. Leaders and managers do not assess the impact of their actions on the quality of provision.
- Assessors do not involve employers in reviewing the progress of apprentices.
- Too few apprentices make the progress that they should. Skills coaches do not adequately assess apprentices' skills and knowledge. They do not provide good feedback on how apprentices can improve.

The provider has the following strengths

- New leaders have taken rapid action and current apprentices are making better progress. They develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that employers value.
- Apprentices quickly make good progress in developing their skills in English and mathematics.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of how to manage risks to their safety and how this applies within their workplaces.
- Apprentices develop a broad range of skills that make them more employable and improve their well-being.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Blue Arrow Limited is a medium-sized national independent learning provider. Blue Arrow Limited is part of the Impellam Group. This is an international recruitment organisation with numerous 'brands' specialising in different employment sectors. Blue Arrow currently provides apprenticeships for approximately 160 of their employees. Around half are on advanced-level apprenticeships, with the remainder on either intermediate or higher level. They offer apprenticeships in business administration, recruitment, team leading and management. Most apprentices are over 19 years old and are on standards-based apprenticeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Senior executives should ensure that leaders are held fully to account for the outcomes and quality of the apprenticeship provision.
- Leaders and managers should set clear targets for improvement with identified actions, which are shared with all staff. They should monitor and review the impact of these actions frequently.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that apprentices make rapid progress and achieve within planned timescales by:
 - making sure that skills coaches have high expectations of what apprentices can achieve
 - involving employers from the start of the learning programmes and link learning closely with apprentices' work activities
 - providing more frequent assessment of apprentices' skills and knowledge, and good developmental feedback.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Until recently, senior executives have been too slow to remedy the poor performance of apprentices. Senior executives are now committed to supporting and developing the apprenticeship programme. Their recent investment in recruiting experienced managers and staff, and their close focus on ensuring that apprentices develop skills quickly are having a positive impact.
- The recently appointed senior leadership team has high expectations and a clear vision for providing apprenticeship programmes. Leaders communicate this well to staff through regular apprenticeship team meetings. This ensures that current apprentices develop good skills, knowledge and behaviours and that achievement rates are improving. However, improved processes and monitoring systems are too new to be fully embedded.
- Leaders and managers do not always set clear targets for improvement with staff. Managers often do not effectively monitor staff performance against individual targets. As a result, managers cannot easily identify what impact their actions have had on improving the provision. Skills coaches now meet with their line managers regularly to discuss individual apprentices' progress, and leaders have recently introduced a new observation process. However, their performance against agreed actions is not reviewed thoroughly enough to ensure rapid improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Leaders and managers do not routinely gather information on where apprentices go, on completion of their programme. Leaders have started to gather this information recently but have only done so for around half of their completed apprentices. As a consequence, leaders are not able to evaluate fully the impact of the provision on the business or individuals.
- Too few skills coaches are experienced in the craft of teaching. As a result, they focus too much on the completion of paperwork and compliance, rather than further developing apprentices' underpinning knowledge and understanding. Skills coaches work collaboratively to share ideas and learning techniques and to standardise assessment practice. It is too soon to judge the impact of this process on sustained improvements.
- Leaders have reviewed and strengthened the apprentice recruitment strategy to ensure that apprentices are placed appropriately on relevant programmes. Apprentices recruited within the last six months are making good progress towards completing their apprenticeship.
- Leaders effectively plan the curriculum to meet and enhance the skills needs within the wider organisation. They have been particularly successful in prioritising the improvement of apprentices' skills in English and mathematics. Managers use the available training opportunities effectively to motivate and upskill their staff, including the apprentices. For example, all staff and apprentices have good opportunities to update and enhance their professional skills through a wide range of development activities, including online courses. Staff value the supportive ethos of the organisation. As a result, more have been retained and there is a marked reduction in sickness levels.
- Managers make good use of data to monitor the progress of current apprentices. They

use this information effectively to ensure that there are no gaps in achievement between different groups of apprentices. They work closely with skills coaches to review the progress of individual apprentices and intervene when necessary. More apprentices are making good progress than at this point last year.

The governance of the provider

- Senior executives did not respond quickly enough to the poor performance of the provision. They now have clear oversight and fully understand what is required to ensure that recent improvements continue and are sustained. They are well informed through the regular meetings and reporting structure of the organisation. For example, the director of apprenticeships reports frequently to the CEO responsible for the UK-based 'brands' of the organisation, who in turn reports to the senior CEO.
- Senior executives and leaders now meet twice a month to scrutinise performance and data. Leaders are effectively challenged against the performance targets agreed with senior executives for retention, timely success and achievement overall. Leaders are now held directly accountable for ensuring that they meet these targets.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have ensured a highly effective culture of safeguarding that is well understood by staff and apprentices across the organisation. In addition, apprentices must complete high-quality online training in safeguarding at the start of their employment or training programme. As a result, they know how to keep themselves safe and how to protect themselves from external risks, such as cyber bullying, grooming, and extremism and radicalisation. Apprentices have a good understanding of the relevance of fundamental British values in their lives and work.
- Leaders follow safer recruitment practices. They maintain a comprehensive and detailed single central record of staff and routinely track completion of all mandatory online training for staff such as safeguarding, cyber bullying, right to work, social media awareness, modern slavery, the 'Prevent' duty and well-being.
- Leaders and staff effectively manage any concerns about apprentices. Two senior members of staff have completed designated safeguarding lead training. A central email address is used effectively to receive referrals, which are then all followed through promptly to resolution. In addition, leaders closely and effectively monitor any apprentices they consider to be vulnerable because of disclosed mental health issues or other concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Skills coaches successfully use their wide range of industrial and commercial experiences to provide context and relevance to apprentices' learning. However, they have limited experience in the craft of teaching and do not effectively evaluate the impact of their teaching on apprentices' progress.
- Too many training sessions do not challenge apprentices effectively, particularly the most

able. Skills coaches do not frequently assess apprentices' knowledge, understanding and skills. Apprentices do not always have sufficient opportunity to demonstrate the new skills they have developed. Coaches do not encourage apprentices to reflect on and consolidate their learning.

- Skills coaches do not have sufficiently high expectations of what apprentices can achieve. Learning sessions are not effectively planned around the needs of individual apprentices and the most able apprentices are not challenged to make swift progress. For example, targets set for apprentices to guide them through their next piece of learning are often not specific enough to their work role or skills. They do not sufficiently challenge apprentices to achieve higher standards or extend and develop their knowledge and skills quickly.
- Skills coaches do not provide sufficiently detailed or regular feedback for apprentices. Feedback is often too superficial and does not often identify clearly to the apprentice or employer how the apprentice can improve the quality of their work.
- Too few employers have sufficient involvement in reviewing and planning apprentices' overall learning. As a result, they are unaware of the future training needs of their apprentices and are unable to provide any additional support needed. Most employers are knowledgeable about the apprenticeship programme. They contribute helpful feedback on their apprentices' progress in their job role and plan further training at work to consolidate and advance apprentices' skills.
- Most current apprentices gain new vocational skills and knowledge in recruitment, customer service and management. These include improved skills in communication and negotiation, people management, and self-organisation. They apply these skills in their job roles with confidence and enthusiasm. For example, apprentices on advanced apprenticeship programmes gain effective skills which they use to manage their teams more effectively, often resulting in increased morale and productivity.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is particularly good. Apprentices quickly develop their skills beyond their starting points and become more effective in their work roles. For example, apprentices become more efficient at proofreading after improving their use of punctuation. They quickly gain a better understanding of the differences between formal and informal communication and how to use these effectively. For example, one apprentice drafted a leaflet in which they made excellent use of alliteration to get the reader's attention.
- English and mathematics sessions are well planned by a specialist tutor and tailored to meet individual learning needs. Skills coaches focus on those skills that apprentices need to improve and practise to be successful. A variety of teaching and learning strategies are used by the specialist tutor which motivate apprentices well. Apprentices with a poor experience of learning mathematics in the past gain increased confidence and a deeper understanding of numerical strategies. For example, by increasing their skills in mental arithmetic and calculating the percentage margin they are better able to understand their sales roles.
- Apprentices enhance their knowledge and skills through the wide variety of high-quality training resources on the virtual learning environment. Apprentices make good use of these courses as part of their off-the-job training. These include short courses and information such as the use of different software applications, time management, communication, conflict management and prioritising tasks. These resources motivate

apprentices to learn independently and the knowledge they gain is directly relevant to their company and job roles.

- Support for apprentices with additional needs is good. Staff swiftly identify additional learning needs at the start of the learning programme. They provide good support, which includes additional time in the workplace for study and reflection, adapted equipment such as lighting and headsets, and other modified learning resources. As a result, these apprentices develop the confidence and skills to be successful in their learning.
- Apprentices demonstrate a sound understanding of equal opportunity and diversity matters and relate this well to their workplace. For example, apprentices are knowledgeable about different cultural and religious traditions and take these into account when talking to potential candidates about their employment terms and conditions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Current apprentices quickly increase their confidence at work as a result of their learning on the apprenticeship. Apprentices increase their effectiveness at work and are proud of their improved performance. Most apprentices complete additional qualifications that increase their future employability. However, for a minority of apprentices, the additional work needed to complete these qualifications distracts them from making progress on their apprenticeship and achieving associated deadlines.
- Current apprentices receive good advice and guidance prior to starting their learning programmes. Since August 2018, new advice and guidance and enrolment processes have improved the way in which apprentices are recruited. However, too many apprentices that were in learning prior to this are not on programmes appropriate to their starting points. For these apprentices the programmes do not challenge them adequately to build on their existing skills.
- Apprentices receive good careers advice and guidance in relation to the wider opportunities available to them within the international organisation in which they work. Apprentices are also very well informed of how their skills will help them progress within the group and through senior leadership roles within it.
- Apprentices benefit from a wide range of activities as part of their off-the-job training which enhances their skills in the workplace. As a result, apprentices contribute more effectively to the business. Apprentices value their off-the-job training time, where they have good access to a range of additional training opportunities. These include visiting colleagues in other centres, online training and centrally organised workshops.
- Apprentices quickly develop skills that make them more employable. These include furthering their ICT, English and mathematics skills, both in the workplace and as part of their learning programmes. Skills coaches link learning closely to apprentices' job roles, making the learning immediately relevant.
- Apprentices have a comprehensive understanding about how to protect themselves from risks, including those associated with radicalisation and extremism and e-safety. In progress reviews, skills coaches hold effective discussions with apprentices about how to keep themselves safe. As a result, apprentices understand themes such as equality and diversity, democracy, individual liberty, tolerance and respect, rule of law, modern

slavery, grooming and radicalisation. They are able to apply these appropriately to their work with clients.

- Apprentices feel and are safe. Apprentices have a very good knowledge of how to raise concerns, both through the provider and their employers. Apprentices improve their health and well-being through staff development, including stress management and positive thinking. In addition, in many branches apprentices act as 'well-being warriors' and use their good understanding to motivate their peers to improve their well-being.
- Apprentices have good and productive working relationships with their peers and employers. They behave well at work and are respectful of peers, visitors and clients. They have a clear understanding of their rights as employees and their role within the wider organisation in which they work. For example, apprentices learn about the company through job shadowing opportunities in other parts of the wider Impellam group. Attendance at workshops and work is high.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Too few apprentices achieve their qualifications in the time planned. Too few apprentices were taken on to programmes that challenge them to learn new skills. As a result, a large proportion left the programme in 2017/18 and many of these left the company altogether. Current apprentices make swift progress from their starting points and good progress in developing new skills, knowledge and behaviours.
- The standards of all apprentices' work are appropriate to their levels. Apprentices' work at intermediate and higher levels in some cases exceeds this. Apprentices gain good skills in negotiating, customer care and sales that benefit the business in which they work.
- Apprentices achieve equally well. Managers monitor the progress of apprentices effectively. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also achieve equally well.
- Apprentices gain and further enhance their skills in English, mathematics and ICT rapidly. As a result, a very large proportion of apprentices achieve their functional skills qualifications in these subjects. A large proportion are successful on their first attempt.
- Most apprentices gain a promotion or increased salary upon successful completion of their programmes. Leaders have recently started to gather information on apprentices' destinations. At the time of inspection, they held information for around half of their completed apprentices; of these, most gained promotion within their office.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1244872
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	359
Principal/CEO	Matt Bungay
Telephone number	01582 692691
Website	n/a

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 learners (excluding apprenticeships)	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	2	26	0	86	0	45		
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	–							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of education, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. 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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Maria Rayworth	Ofsted Inspector
Nicholas Sanders	Ofsted Inspector
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