

PGL Travel Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 53876

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Inspection date(s): 20-21 March 2019

Type of provider: Employer

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by ESFA and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

PGL Travel Ltd (PGL) is a privately-owned company which provides a range of residential activity holidays for some 250,000 young people per year from 24 centres in the United Kingdom including seven in France and three in Australia. PGL has 3,000 seasonal staff, most of whom work from March to November. All apprentices are on standards-based apprenticeships and are employees of the company. Of the 23 levy-funded apprentices in learning during the inspection week, 20 are on team leader/ supervisor level 3 and three are on a level 2 hospitality team member programme. A further six staff are receiving training in the 'chef academy' but they were not in scope of the monitoring visit because they did not wish to enrol as apprentices. The first cohort of 23 apprentices started their training in 2017/18. The company was last inspected in 2009 for their apprenticeship and Train to Gain contract. Since then the company has worked as a subcontractor, but that arrangement ended in 2015.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have a clear strategy and vision to develop the skills of the workforce through well-designed and high-quality apprenticeship provision. They are highly ambitious for their apprentices. To realise their vision, leaders have invested a substantial amount of time, money, effort and energy to establish an ambitious curriculum plan for the apprenticeship provision. They have worked very closely with the sector skills body, People First, to develop standards and run a pilot project from PGL's own funds. They have increased the number of learning and development officers (L&DOs) from two to five and enhanced the professional support to L&DOs by employing three specialist programme leaders.

Further improvement and investments include development of an e-portfolio; this enables L&DOs and apprentices to record and store their details and portfolio evidence. By purchasing a 'computer lab' of 16 computers, managers have enabled apprentices to have easy access to information communication technology (ICT) facilities. Apprentices use these confidently to research and to present their work.

Other substantial investments that have improved the focus on learning is the design of learning resources and the rewriting of schemes of work and lesson plans. This means that L&DOs and other guest tutors focus their lessons on developing knowledge, skills and behaviours they expect apprentices to achieve by the end of the period or the programme.

Leaders and managers ensure that the programmes meet the principles and requirements of the funding agency and institute of apprenticeships. These include a minimum of 20% off-the-job training. This is managed by a six-week residential programme during the winter break, interspersed with a period of self-study when apprentices from both programmes consolidate their knowledge and skills.

Having experienced significant delays in securing an assessor for the end-point assessment (EPA), managers persevered with the current end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) to enable apprentices to complete their programme. Apprentices and their line managers are fully aware of the requirements of the EPA and the grades they can achieve. L&DOs prepare apprentices fully for EPA through helpful coaching, mock-assessment and live projects. Consequently, most apprentices have achieved either a merit or a distinction. Those in learning expect to achieve similarly high grades.

A highly experienced and qualified director provides an exceptionally strong governance function and holds senior managers to account. For example, when at the end of year 1 a significant number of apprentices had either withdrawn or left learning, she commissioned a 'root and branch' review of the apprenticeship provision with particularly strong emphasis on listening to the apprentices. She seeks detailed monthly reports and scrutinises them meticulously. Senior managers have a detailed knowledge of the apprenticeship provision including the apprentices' progress, quality of training, and reasons for non-achievement.

Managers recruit apprentices after a thorough analysis of the roles, aptitude of the apprentices, the time commitment they can give. They consider fully the immediate and medium-term benefits of qualified staff to the company and the benefits to the apprentices. In 2017/18 managers did not give due consideration to recruitment and as a result several apprentices dropped out of their programme. Reflective and thoughtful managers have implemented diligently the lessons learned from the first cohort. They took particularly effective action to improve the rigour of recruitment, revised the structure of the programme by including more guest speakers, increased the number of live projects and adjusted the timescale of residentials and study periods. These actions have made the programmes more beneficial to the business and the apprentices.

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

Significant progress

Apprentices develop and apply new knowledge, skills and behaviours that improve their effectiveness at work and benefit their employer. They gain deeper knowledge of, for example: coaching and mentoring, time management, project management, managing staff performance, finance and communications. Apprentices improve their communication skills as well as their relationships in teams. They improve their confidence substantially and become highly skilled team leaders/supervisors.

Apprentices on the hospitality team member programme develop good knowledge of food safety and preparation. They learn, and use, knife skills safely, prepare food hygienically. They make use of their knowledge to cut wastage and present food to customers to make it look attractive. As their confidence grows, apprentices prepare healthy breakfasts and evening meals, as well as sandwiches, for a large number of young holiday makers.

Well-qualified and experienced staff with teaching and industrial experience in the sector provide highly effective learning to the apprentices. L&DOs make highly efficient use of video and audio technology to record reviews and professional discussions. They use discussions to challenge apprentices to think more deeply to use their knowledge to solve problems and develop their communication skills and confidence. The virtual learning environment is well organised with high-quality materials; apprentices are rightly positive about how this supports their independent studies.

L&DOs conduct a thorough analysis of the prior learning, existing skills, knowledge and experiences of apprentices, including skills in English and mathematics, to establish their starting points. This helps L&DOs to design an individual programme of learning for each apprentice and focus their teaching, learning, assessment and individual support to fill the specific gaps in their learning accordingly.

Off-the-job training is of a high quality and links seamlessly with the employer's business. This enhances apprentices' knowledge greatly. Line managers work very closely with the apprentices to identify projects that will benefit the apprentices and the company. Apprentices apply this knowledge in a variety of work contexts to solve problems and design innovative projects to improve the quality of services.

Although most apprentices have the necessary qualifications in both English and mathematics at the start of the programme, they see the importance and clear benefits of the development of these subjects to their daily work and prospects. For example, an apprentice found that, having done functional skills in English, the quality of his emails to external agencies as well as peers and managers has improved substantially. This has enhanced the image of his company and improved his written skills greatly. Apprentices benefit from excellent support to help them develop and consolidate their skills in English and mathematics. For example, a functional skills tutor referred an apprentice who had difficulty in spelling to a useful resource on the most commonly misspelled words. This helped her to develop strategies to improve her spelling.

The standards of apprentices' work are high. Apprentices are making rapid progress. Written work is evaluative, self-critical and most of it is error-free. Staff routinely point out how apprentices can improve their spellings and sentence structure to improve clarity of thought and communication. Apprentices receive regular feedback; this helps them to evaluate their learning. They identify ways to improve and focus on developing their knowledge and skills. However, a few tutors do not specifically comment on knowledge, skills and behaviour in their written feedback.

Significant improvements to the programme include the development of the range and quality of learning resources and rewriting of the schemes of work and lesson plans. These changes have improved the quality of learning and support exceptionally well. Managers have plans to conduct a similar review of the hospitality team member programme to increase the number of apprentices on it.

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

Safeguarding is embedded in the structure and practices of the company. It is an essential part of the company culture. All staff have detailed knowledge of the various aspects of safeguarding. They use this knowledge diligently to carry out their responsibilities to protect young people in their care from harm and from dangers within society. They deal with any issues pertaining to extremist views, or disclosures, and refer matters to the appropriate agencies such as the police and local authorities.

The company implements a safer recruitment policy and appoints suitable staff only after thorough checks on their identity, background and work experience.

The training to safeguard young people is extensive. A well-respected specialist company provides helpful training to all staff on a range of topics such as the 'Prevent' duty, extremism, British values, child sexual exploitation, bullying and harassment, e-safety, safe use of social media, domestic violence, and alcohol abuse. This training enhances apprentices' knowledge and prepares them thoroughly to keep themselves, and a young person under their care, safe.

All the 14 centres have a safeguarding lead and a deputy to deal with any issues because PGL centres run 24 hours of the day and work with young people from secondary schools, youth groups, uniform groups such as Cubs and Brownies, and the National Citizenship Service. Ofsted has inspected 11 of the centres with their own unique reference number and deemed these to be meeting safeguarding requirements.

PGL has a senior management team that has an overview of safeguarding within the company. They provide timely advice, counselling and support. They receive information of any incidents and the outcomes of investigations. Senior managers

seek an analytical report on all incidents and take proactive action to mitigate risks, revising guidance to staff accordingly. For example, managers devised a clear procedure on how to handle disclosure by young people.

To ensure that safeguarding remains the top priority in the company, managers have revised the course design and included health and safety and safeguarding matters in all lesson plans and schemes of work. In addition, managers have produced a very detailed and helpful learners' handbook with a summary of key points of learning. Apprentices use this as reference material as it has detailed guidance on bullying and harassment, physical contact, equality and diversity and use of language – topics they could encounter in their daily work.

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