

Advanced Personnel Management Group (UK) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

19–22 March 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Senior managers and governors have not rectified all of the key weaknesses that were identified at the previous inspection.
- Leaders and managers have not planned the curriculum well enough to reflect the strategic aims of the organisation.
- Leaders' and governors' planned curriculum fails to provide sufficient links for learners and apprentices between courses and levels for them to make the best possible progress.
- Tutors do not provide apprentices with enough feedback on their progress to ensure that they achieve the grades of which they are capable and to complete their course in the time allocated.
- Learners do not receive sufficiently impartial and helpful information to ensure that they follow the most appropriate course for their needs.
- Too few learners and apprentices have a deep enough understanding of the potential threats from extremism and radicalisation.

The provider has the following strengths

- Most learners and apprentices enjoy their learning and are motivated by the renewed experience of learning after a long break from formal study.
- Learners and apprentices understand how their courses will benefit them in their work and personal lives. Consequently, they work diligently to complete their activities to a good standard.
- Adult learners gain new knowledge in areas such as listening skills and mental health awareness, which enhance their lives.
- The minority of apprentices who are required to take a qualification in English and/or mathematics achieve well.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Advanced Personnel Management (APM) Group (UK) Limited is a privately owned training provider. The main administration centre is in Newtown, Birmingham. The provider holds three contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) that also include study programme provision. APM Group (UK) Ltd is the parent company of all three contracts with the ESFA. This inspection was of apprenticeship and adult education programmes.
- At the time of inspection, a team of four staff delivered apprenticeship programmes to 68 learners. The large majority of apprentices undertake standards-based management apprenticeships at levels 3 and 5. The remainder is comprised of a small number of business administration apprentices and a few apprentices completing apprenticeship frameworks. Most adult learners were on programmes delivered through a subcontract with Total Training Provision, which delivers a range of blended learning programmes to employed learners.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that governors support senior leaders to remedy swiftly the identified weaknesses.
- Ensure that leaders:
 - revise the curriculum to match closely the needs and interests of the learners and apprentices they aim to engage
 - plan the curriculum so that learners and apprentices can move to higher levels of learning and make progress towards achieving their career ambitions.
- Ensure that tutors:
 - use information about apprentices' progress to provide them with accurate and timely feedback to help them achieve the grades of which they are capable and in the planned timescale
 - provide learners with the appropriate information, advice and guidance to help them make informed choices about future career options
 - ensure that all learners and apprentices are able to demonstrate a good understanding of extremist views and the threat of radicalisation.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Senior managers and governors have not addressed all of the recommendations from the previous inspection. For example, the quality of provision is not yet consistently good. The use of management information requires further improvement to ensure that leaders and managers monitor closely the progress of learners and apprentices. Too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship in the time allocated.
- Senior managers are working to improve and coordinate the information that managers receive about learners and apprentices so that they can improve their performance rapidly. Managers also engage in frequent conversations about the performance of tutors, subcontractors, apprentices and learners. However, managers cannot demonstrate sufficient impact on improving learners' and apprentices' progress. Additionally, they do not know the proportion of learners who gain promotion or are successful in moving on to another career.
- Leaders do not monitor and track consistently apprentices' progress. Just under half of apprentices on standards-based management apprenticeships are behind schedule. Managers are not acting quickly enough to prevent these apprentices from falling behind.
- Leaders and managers have significantly increased the proportion of apprentices achieving functional skills qualifications on time. This is largely through placing functional skills delivery at the beginning of the course and through the appointment of specialist staff. However, tutors and assessors do not extend learners' and apprentices' English and mathematical skills beyond the requirements of the course so learners and apprentices are not achieving according to their potential.
- Leaders and managers have not produced a curriculum which has clear and appropriate progression routes into further study or a range of career options. There is no common purpose or productive link between the contract with their subcontractor – which delivers most of the adult provision – and the apprenticeship programme. Within the apprenticeship programme, there is no clear focus on reaching out to vulnerable learners, which is a key strand of APM group's overall strategy. For example, there is no provision at level 2. Leaders have begun consulting experts to ensure that provision meets their strategic intention to 'enable better lives'.
- Senior managers have produced a self-assessment report which is accurate and identifies the key strengths and weaknesses. They have produced a separate report on apprenticeships, which identifies many significant weaknesses, with broad actions for improvement. Managers do not outline in enough detail the specific actions needed to deliver their intended outcomes. Too many targets are ongoing or do not have specific end dates. Consequently, leaders and managers do not have a timely and accurate view of their progress.
- Managers do not monitor closely enough learners' and apprentices' learning experience to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. Managers have completed only a few observations of assessors and only two observations of apprenticeship reviews. Managers' actions to improve the quality of provision, such as staff development sessions to enhance tutors' skills in providing effective feedback, have

yet to impact positively on apprentices' experience. A minority of assessors have left the company as a result of performance management.

- Managers make regular contact with subcontractors who report on enrolments, numbers of learners staying on programme and funding against the provider's targets. However, managers do not pay enough attention to the quality of delivery, and focus too much on achievement rates. Managers use learners' views to inform their improvement actions. However, they have identified – as did inspectors – the need for more frequent analysis of learners' and apprentices' experience while on programme in order to improve provision.

The governance of the provider

- The provider has an executive team that fulfils the function of governance. The team has been slow to ensure that managers tackle swiftly the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
- In the last year, the team has set up a quality board, chaired by the head of quality and compliance, to report to the executive team. Consequently, governors have a broadly accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses. However, they are overly positive in relation to apprenticeship progress and focus too heavily on the overall achievement of learners and apprentices.
- Although governors monitor contractual performance of subcontractors well in terms of meeting enrolment, retention and achievement targets, they do not monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in sufficient detail.
- Governors are overseeing the development of a curriculum offer which is more relevant to the aspirations and values of the company.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have developed an appropriate and comprehensive safeguarding policy. They have ensured that there are sufficient designated safeguarding officers who have received enhanced training to support learners and apprentices. All staff receive annually updated training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have also developed appropriate processes for the safer recruitment of staff, including background checks and references.
- Managers report safeguarding issues to the quality executive management meeting. Senior leaders receive an annual safeguarding and critical incidents report, which gives an overview of incidents that have occurred. Leaders have effective links with agencies local to the head office, such as mental health services, to ensure that learners and apprentices receive the support needed to continue with their programmes.
- Learners report that they feel safe and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe at work, in the community and online. However, learners have only a superficial understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, and how these issues relate to the local community.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Tutors in the subcontracted adult provision do not use the information of learners' starting points effectively to ensure that they plan work that helps them to extend their skills. Tutors focus on remedying learners' basic English and mathematics errors so that they can meet the writing requirements of the course. Although improving general spelling and grammar mistakes, tutors do not ensure that learners improve these skills over time.
- Assessors do not ensure that apprentices develop English and mathematical skills beyond the level required for their course. Consequently, apprentices do not make progress in these subjects according to their potential.
- Assessors' feedback to apprentices is not sufficiently helpful for them to understand how well they are making progress and how to achieve higher grades. Most of their feedback focuses on what tasks apprentices have completed and the tasks required for the next review. The majority of apprentices know they are aiming for a distinction grade. However, they do not receive sufficient guidance to know how to reach this standard.
- Tutors work well with learners to encourage them back into learning. They use coaching methods effectively, helping learners to access and relate to the subject information in the self-study course material. As a result, learners build confidence and self-esteem and use the skills developed in their personal and working lives. For example, learners studying a mental health awareness course talk positively about being able to understand and provide additional support within their families.
- Assessors provide apprentices with appropriate learning activities that link closely to their individual work environments. For example, apprentices take personality tests to assess their approaches to teamwork. As a result, apprentices use key management theories to improve the performance of their own individual teams effectively.
- Tutors provide learners with thorough support through face-to-face meetings and online sessions. They make effective adjustments to ensure that learners who have additional learning needs receive the necessary support. For example, tutors who work with learners using British sign language adapt their feedback and use texts, emails and more frequent meetings so that learners receive the information needed to improve their work.
- Apprentices who need to develop their English and mathematics functional skills receive effective support from specialist well-qualified and experienced tutors. They identify accurately apprentices' basic English and mathematics needs and devise appropriate activities to help them master the skills they need.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too few apprentices attend off-the-job workshops frequently enough and receive the help needed for them to make good progress on their course. Most learners are not required to attend formal learning sessions and complete their work independently. The few learners studying employability courses attend consistently.
- Learners do not receive sufficiently impartial and helpful information to ensure that they follow the most appropriate courses for their needs. Learners often choose courses that

interest them. Although providing them with useful knowledge in areas such as dementia awareness, few courses directly support their career development. Most apprentices receive useful information to ensure that they follow the right programme for their role. However, in a few cases, apprentices are not sufficiently well informed and start programmes that do not link closely enough to their job roles.

- Too few apprentices and learners extend their English, mathematics and digital skills beyond the level expected for their course, irrespective of their potential. Most learners achieve their short courses, routinely producing work that is comprehensive and to a high standard. Apprentices' work is of at least the standard expected of them and supports them in their role.
- The large majority of learners and apprentices have not studied formally for some time. They are motivated and enjoy their learning. They understand how their courses will benefit them in their work and personal lives. They work diligently to complete their activities to a good standard.
- Learners develop their confidence and personal and social skills through peer working and group discussions. Business management apprentices learn how to manage their daily activities more efficiently and develop confidence in dealing with people. Learners become secure in their knowledge and apply confidently their understanding in their work. For example, they use listening skills to support colleagues or show empathy with customers from diverse backgrounds.
- Learners and apprentices who experience challenges while studying receive effective support that helps them to complete their courses. For example, apprentices are provided with additional one-to-one sessions, workshops and regular access to their assessors so that they receive the help need to catch up.
- Learners and apprentices have a rudimentary understanding of the potential threats from extremism and radicalisation. They are not sufficiently aware of the particular issues posed in their local communities. Those learners who study safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty courses have a good knowledge and demonstrate thoroughly their understanding.
- Learners feel safe and know who to go to if they have concerns. They demonstrate an appropriate understanding of how to work safely online.
- Learners and apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of British values in the workplace and the wider community. They work respectfully with colleagues, listening carefully and taking account of each other's needs.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Most adult learners study and achieve level 2 certificate courses over an eight-week period. These include subjects such as customer service, information technology (IT) and a range of health-related qualifications including dementia, diabetes and alcohol awareness. A few learners undertake qualifications in English and mathematics. The very few learners who take employability courses complete and achieve their programmes.
- Too few apprentices achieved their qualifications in the previous year, many failing to achieve within the time allocated. The large majority of apprenticeship provision is below

the minimum standards of performance set by the ESFA.

- In the current year, the majority of apprentices make at least the progress expected of them. However, too few apprentices on standards-based management programmes make the progress that they should.
- Most adult learners remain on their courses and achieve their qualifications. Although a small minority go beyond the time allocated to them, they are provided with support so that nearly all learners achieve their qualifications.
- In previous years, most learners and apprentices who study functional skills English and IT achieve their qualifications. However, the proportion who achieved mathematics qualifications was low. In the current year, most learners and apprentices make good progress and achieve their functional skills qualifications in these subjects.
- Male and female learners and apprentices achieve equally well. Learners from a Black or Asian heritage achieve better than their peers. However, learners from a mixed heritage do not achieve as well as most learners. Additionally, learners who have an identified learning need do not achieve as well as their peers.
- Adult learners produce work of a good standard. Apprentices' work is at the standard expected of them.
- Most adult learners and apprentices remain with their employer. A small minority move on to more complex roles within their business and continue in further learning.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that adult programmes focus sufficiently on people who are disadvantaged and least likely to participate in education. This contradicts their stated strategic aims. Leaders have designed most of the provision to support learners in full-time employment to improve their experience at work. These learners access a broad menu of self-study short courses related to health and safety, health and well-being and areas such as customer service.
- Tutors do not use information of most learners' starting points well enough to identify their prior learning, personal aspirations and satisfaction levels with work. They focus mainly on ensuring that learners can undertake the writing required for their short course. Consequently, too few learners receive sufficiently stretching targets to develop their English, mathematical and digital skills.
- Too few learners receive impartial and helpful careers advice and guidance. The large majority of learners choose their own courses with little or no involvement from tutors or employers. For example, tutors fail to provide learners who want to progress at work or move to higher levels of study with the appropriate information and guidance to help them realise their goals.
- Learners who study these short courses benefit from accessible and useful learning programmes that spark their interest. They develop an introductory awareness of new subjects, such as team-leading or counselling skills. Tutors review learners' progress

routinely and provide them with constructive feedback to improve their written work. For example, learners receive feedback on the accuracy and completeness of their work and help for the more difficult questions they find challenging. Although most learners produce a high standard of written work, too often, tutors fail to ensure that learners sustain improvements in their English skills.

- Leaders provide highly effective employability programmes for a very small minority of learners who have significant barriers to employment. These learners benefit from very effective teaching and pastoral support that help them develop the skills to take their next steps. They develop confidence in their literacy and numeracy skills and learn how to work well individually and in groups.
- Tutors provide learners on employability courses with very helpful information about future careers that encourages them to work hard and achieve their goals. As a result, these learners routinely make rapid progress, for example from entry level to level 2 qualifications. A high proportion of these learners go straight into employment.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Most apprentices are on levels 3 to 5 standards-based apprenticeships in management and health and social care. The remainder follow framework apprenticeships in a range of administrative subjects.
- Managers have revised the apprenticeship programme since the last inspection and have introduced standards-based programmes. Leaders and managers ensure that apprenticeships meet the principles for apprenticeship programmes, with only a very few examples of learners not receiving time to develop their learning during working hours. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
- Staff have planned the off-the-job training components of the apprenticeship well so that qualification requirements closely meet employers' business needs. However, as a result of assessor changes, leaders have been unable to ensure that apprentices have received all the training and delivery originally planned. This has slowed the progress of a significant minority of apprentices.
- Managers have failed to ensure that assessors and staff who are responsible for quality assurance have enough information to monitor apprentices' progress precisely. Too few apprentices receive targets to help them keep on track with their work. Apprentices do not receive enough feedback on how to improve their work to help them achieve higher grades. Too often, assessors fail to identify quickly enough apprentices who are at risk of non-achievement or slow achievement. As a result, apprentices do not receive timely support to enable them to catch up with their work.
- Apprentices who need to undertake a qualification in English and mathematics as part of their programme achieve well. Their specialist tutors provide them with effective support. They use a range of teaching techniques to improve apprentices' confidence and practice of these skills in the workplace. For example, they use budgeting principles to analyse cash flow and income projection. Almost all apprentices develop their skills quickly and pass their examinations first time. However, assessors fail to support apprentices who hold the requisite qualifications in these subjects to develop these skills to their potential.

- Assessors deliver apprentices' off-the-job sessions well. However, attendance at these sessions is not consistently good. Assessors plan their sessions effectively, taking account of apprentices' needs. Apprentices enjoy a variety of interesting activities which enable them to apply theoretical concepts in the workplace. Consequently, apprentices are more able to complete their written assignments confidently and to a good standard.
- On completion of their apprenticeship, most apprentices remain in their current roles. An increasing proportion move on to new and more complex roles. However, a few apprentices do not move quickly enough into their intended positions because they do not receive a good level of support.
- Employers value their apprentices and encourage them in their study. They recognise correctly apprentices' improved knowledge, increased skills and contribution to their businesses. However, too many employers are rightly concerned about their apprentices' slow progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54969
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	961
Principal/CEO	Alan Cave
Telephone number	0121 450 8300
Website	apm-uk.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 learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	4	-	819	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	2	-	41	-	25		
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:	Total Training Provision							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of quality and compliance, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. 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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