

# The Apprentice Academy Limited

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

10–13 January 2017

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>	Apprenticeships <b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>	
Outcomes for learners	<b>Good</b>	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Ambitious and enthusiastic leaders and managers have provided good strategic direction resulting in good improvements in the quality of provision.
- Governance arrangements are strong and result in governors competently supporting and challenging leaders and managers.
- Strong relationships with employers and professional bodies ensure that local, regional and national priorities are met.
- The recruitment process is thorough and it provides apprentices with a very good introduction to their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices benefit from good information, advice and guidance, including independent careers advice and guidance.
- Collaboration between apprentices' line managers and The Apprentice Academy staff to plan learning is highly effective.
- Staff ensure that apprentices' workplace experience and off-the-job training are combined particularly successfully.
- Staff provide a good standard of teaching and assessment, including one-to-one coaching.
- Career coaches and trainers provide high levels of support to apprentices.
- Apprentices have a very good understanding of safeguarding, extremism, radicalisation and values underpinning life in modern Britain.
- Apprentices progressively acquire a very good range of vocational knowledge, skills and understanding and they make good progress.
- Apprentices develop their employability skills, personal attributes and the attitudes they need in the workplace very successfully.
- Most apprentices are very capable, enthusiastic and highly motivated; they enjoy their learning.
- Apprentices who already hold English and mathematics qualifications at level 2, including GCSEs at grades A\* to C, do not continue to develop these skills.
- Too often apprentices are not sufficiently clear about what they need to do to improve their written work to achieve a higher standard.
- Career coaches' questioning does not always probe apprentices' knowledge and understanding sufficiently.
- Not all apprentices are consistently challenged in the workplace to enable them to achieve their full potential.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- The Apprentice Academy Limited (TAA) operates from its headquarters and delivery centre in Manchester city centre. It is funded by the Skills Funding Agency to provide training and development opportunities for apprentices. TAA specialises in business administration, accounting, social media and digital marketing, customer service, and management apprenticeships.
- Approximately 1.3 million people work in Manchester. Eleven per cent of the working-age population in Manchester have no qualifications compared to 9% nationally. In 2014/15, 54% of pupils in Manchester attained five GCSEs, including English and mathematics, at grades A\* to C, compared to the national average of 53%. According to the 2011 census, 34% of all residents in Manchester were of a minority ethnic heritage compared to 21% nationally.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that apprentices who already hold English and mathematics qualifications at level 2, including GCSEs at grades A\* to C, have the opportunity to revise any weak areas and to develop their English and mathematical competencies to higher levels so they become increasingly proficient and highly skilled in using English and mathematics in their work and personal lives.
- Make sure all apprentices are very clear about what they need to do to improve their written work to achieve a higher standard.
- Develop career coaches' questioning techniques so that they become highly skilled at questioning apprentices and thoroughly probing their knowledge and understanding.
- Ensure that all apprentices are consistently challenged in the workplace to enable them to achieve their full potential.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Enthusiastic and ambitious leaders and managers, competently supported and challenged by governors, provide good strategic direction for improving the provision. Leaders and managers have a real passion for supporting apprentices to succeed and have responded well to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They are ambitious to improve performance. This has led to good teaching, learning and assessment and good outcomes.
- Leaders and managers have focused the range of apprenticeship programmes to meet closely the skills needs of Greater Manchester. The strong working relationships developed by leaders and managers with employers and professional bodies ensure that the range of provision closely matches current and emerging local, regional and national priorities.
- The self-assessment report is highly evaluative, largely accurate and links closely with the quality improvement plan. The report identifies the strengths of the provision and most of the areas for improvement. However, it is over-generous in grading outcomes for learners, and personal development, behaviour and welfare, as outstanding. Managers make very good use of a broad range of relevant data to monitor regularly the key performance data linked to the areas identified as requiring improvement.
- Managers carry out a good range of quality assurance activities and regularly review progress at quality improvement meetings. They focus specifically on the areas for improvement identified in the self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. Managers have significantly improved the self-assessment process. Staff members', apprentices' and employers' views are taken into account as part of this process. However, this involvement is too informal. For example, the views of a sample of different-sized employers, on a good range of questions, are secured as part of research activity but employers are not told that this is key information which will inform self-assessment.
- Well-trained managers also regularly observe and accurately evaluate the quality of the key teaching, learning and assessment activities. Following these observations, managers provide career coaches with constructive feedback that identifies strengths and areas for improvement. The results of observations, along with the key information from their annual appraisals, inform the frequent one-to-one meetings that career coaches have with their manager. Career coaches are appropriately qualified and benefit from good ongoing professional development.
- Well-qualified staff provide apprentices with good information, advice and guidance during the comprehensive selection processes. As a result, apprentices choose a suitable apprenticeship programme or are signposted to other training or education options. This good information, advice and guidance, including independent careers advice and guidance, continues throughout their programmes.
- Leaders and managers have ensured a very inclusive learning and development culture and they ensure that all staff promote equality of opportunity and the importance of valuing and respecting diversity. Career coaches promote British values effectively.
- The improvements in the provision have been particularly rapid since the previous inspection and especially since the introduction of external governors. However, leaders

and managers have not ensured that they place sufficient priority on improving apprentices' English and mathematical competencies, and this requires improvement.

### **The governance of the provider**

- Managers have improved governance arrangements since the previous inspection and these are now strong. Two carefully selected external governors with complementary skills and experience now support and challenge managers to improve the provision. This has ensured good identification and prioritisation of areas for improvement and closer monitoring of improvement activity.
- The governors meet regularly and thoroughly review the minutes of the monthly senior management team meetings, which include reviews of key performance data. They provide good levels of support and challenge to help ensure continued improvement.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have a strong focus on safeguarding which includes a significantly improved, and now good, approach to meeting the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. Apprentices and their employers learn about the importance of safeguarding, online safety, and the dangers of extremism and radicalisation at the start of the apprenticeship programmes. Career coaches then broaden this awareness by using good learning resources and carefully planned discussions with apprentices during off-the-job training and workplace reviews. Managers maintain a comprehensive 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan, and suitably trained staff have the skills and knowledge to manage any concerns appropriately.
- Managers ensure that all staff who have contact with apprentices who are under 18 years of age are appropriately checked for their suitability and re-checked frequently.
- Managers set clear safeguarding and health and safety expectations for employers. Career coaches regularly check on the well-being of their apprentices during monthly visits to the workplaces.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- The provider has 47 intermediate apprentices, 90 advanced apprentices and three higher-level apprentices. Apprenticeships are offered in five subject areas, the largest of which are business administration, and social media and digital marketing. TAA provides all the apprenticeships directly rather than through subcontractors.
- Apprentices benefit considerably from highly effective collaboration between their line managers in their workplace and the provider's trainers. Line managers have a detailed understanding of the apprenticeship requirements, gained through a well-planned and timely training day that TAA provides when employers first take on an apprentice. This training prepares them very effectively to support their new apprentices.
- The provider's career coaches collaborate closely with managers to plan and deliver programmes for the apprentices that bring together workplace experience and off-the-job training particularly successfully. This results in apprentices developing the knowledge, skills and understanding that enable them to make significant contributions to the workplace and become valued employees.
- Teaching staff and career coaches use their vocational knowledge and extensive sector experience very effectively to provide a good standard of teaching, learning and

assessment. They challenge apprentices to adopt professional attitudes towards their work and set high standards for them to achieve. Off-the-job training workshops are relevant, interesting and appropriately resourced.

- Apprentices speak confidently about how they apply the knowledge gained during off-the-job training when they return to the workplace, where career coaches consolidate this understanding through well-focused one-to-one coaching. The quality of apprentices' practical and written work is good. Career coaches evaluate apprentices' progress through regular and carefully planned assessments, recognising success and identifying areas for further learning. However, their questioning does not always probe apprentices' knowledge and understanding sufficiently.
- A thorough recruitment process provides apprentices with a very good introduction to their apprenticeship. They value the two-day workshop at the start of their apprenticeship which provides them with sound guidance about applying for jobs, how to approach their interviews and practical tips, for example about the importance of a handshake.
- Staff reinforce apprentices' knowledge appropriately during training sessions and through discussions in the workplace, skilfully contextualising topics such as radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices have a very good understanding of values underpinning life in modern Britain.
- Apprentices benefit from high levels of support from their career coaches. This makes a strong contribution to their motivation and their good progress. Those who fall behind in their learning receive prompt and effective support from career coaches to catch up.
- Wider support extends to personal advice and guidance which apprentices appreciate. For example, if apprentices acknowledge that they are poor at managing their finances they receive money management guidance from their career coach. Specialist support is also available to apprentices, for example in tackling mental health issues. Staff collaborate to ensure that such support is timely, focused and delivered in a culturally sensitive manner.
- Career coaches do not look systematically and consistently for opportunities to develop further the skills and knowledge of all apprentices, most of whom begin with strong GCSE and A-level results. Consequently, there is insufficient challenge to apprentices to develop their professional competencies more extensively.
- Career coaches do not recognise apprentices' potential adequately or build sufficiently on the results of assessment that identify their starting points. Their targets focus on ensuring that apprentices complete their framework requirements and develop work skills. They do not extend apprentices sufficiently, for example through regular planned independent learning or the completion of higher-level units. Feedback on written work too often does not tell apprentices how it can be developed to a higher standard.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Good**

- Apprentices develop their personal and employability skills and the attitudes they need to display in the workplace very effectively. These include reliability, commitment, showing respect for others, taking a pride in the quality of their work and having a positive attitude. Apprentices' attendance and punctuality are good.
- The standard of apprentices' work is good. They develop increased confidence and become valued employees quickly. They contribute very effectively to their employers' businesses and increasingly undertake more complex tasks and additional responsibilities to broaden their experience. Apprentices very successfully tackle tasks such as running

payrolls, dealing with business complaints and making presentations at team meetings.

- Information, advice and guidance are good. In particular, staff provide clear and comprehensive information on programmes to potential applicants before they apply to become apprentices. Ongoing independent careers advice and guidance are also good and apprentices are fully aware of local and regional employment opportunities. They make well-informed choices about the next stage of their education, training and employment.
- The selection and recruitment processes are very good. Highly qualified applicants are attracted to the programme. During a two-day assessment workshop for applicants, staff ensure that they are suitable and matched carefully to apprenticeship vacancies. Before the apprenticeship starts, the selected applicants attend an extremely relevant three-day training programme that provides wider guidance around programme requirements and develops their understanding of equality and diversity, the 'Prevent' duty and safeguarding. It acts as a 'bridge' between school and employment and prepares them successfully for entering the world of work.
- Apprentices benefit from additional training and development provided by employers that complements the training provided by TAA. For example, one large employer provides specialist training in the use of spreadsheet software and software development that reinforces and extends the training provided by TAA.
- Apprentices have a very good understanding of safeguarding and know what to do if they have a concern. They also understand how to keep themselves safe when online and how to use social media responsibly, in ways that do not jeopardise their career prospects. Apprentices have a very good understanding of the risks posed by radicalisation and those who hold extremist views. Staff reinforce this understanding throughout the programme during induction, workshops and assessor visits.
- Staff provide good personal support for apprentices and promote health and well-being very effectively throughout the programme, including during progress reviews. For example, career coaches provide support with smoking cessation and anxiety issues and, where appropriate, refer apprentices to an effective professional counselling service provided by TAA.
- The provider places very good emphasis on working with employers who can offer excellent career progression opportunities. Most apprentices become valued employees and make substantial contributions to their employers' businesses. For example, they help to increase business revenue, suggest and implement new ways of working and, in commercial environments, negotiate high-value deals and maintain exemplary customer service.
- Staff motivate apprentices and proudly celebrate their achievements. They recognise high performance through the three-monthly 'star awards', where employers nominate apprentices for their contributions at work. Reasons for nominations include apprentices' positive attitudes that lift the spirits of colleagues, involvement in work-related charity events and stepping in at short notice to prepare materials for a major conference.
- Apprentices who already hold English and mathematics qualifications at level 2, including GCSEs at grades A\* to C, do not consistently develop English and mathematical skills to a higher level. In a minority of instances, staff carry out diagnostic assessment to identify the specific skills that they need to develop too late, reducing the amount of time available to learn.

## Outcomes for learners

Good

- An increasing number of intermediate and advanced apprentices complete their apprenticeships successfully. In 2015/16, the completion rate for 16- to 18-year-old intermediate and advanced apprentices was high and for the small number of 19- to 23-year-old intermediate and advanced apprentices it was very high.
- In 2015/16, a high percentage of 16- to 18-year-old advanced apprentices and 19- to 23-year-old intermediate and advanced apprentices completed their apprenticeships on or before their planned end date. However, too few 16- to 18-year-old intermediate apprentices completed within the planned learning period. Managers and career coaches have taken effective action to improve completion rates within planned learning periods and early indications suggest that further improvement is likely in the current year.
- Staff track and monitor each apprentice's progress rigorously and quickly identify those who are at risk of falling behind. Where needed, apprentices receive good additional support to ensure they catch up as soon as possible.
- Apprentices progressively acquire a very good range of vocational knowledge, skills and understanding that enable them to carry out their job roles efficiently and effectively. Additionally, they make very good progress in developing further a range of personal attributes. Their self-confidence and self-assurance increase quickly, they develop positive attitudes to work and their oral and non-verbal communication skills improve considerably.
- Many apprentices make excellent progress in their chosen careers, for example in business administration, customer service, and digital marketing. Almost all apprentices progress successfully when they complete their apprenticeship as a result of their good personal development and the vocational knowledge, skills and understanding they have developed during their apprenticeship. Many progress to more senior positions with their apprenticeship employer or, on completion of their apprenticeship, with another employer. A significant number progress from the apprenticeship to the advanced apprenticeship while others progress to further training at college or university.
- Most apprentices hold good qualifications and are already very capable and highly motivated when they begin their apprenticeship. They enjoy their learning and enthusiastically engage with the apprenticeship training and learning. However, career coaches do not always challenge apprentices sufficiently to help them realise their full potential.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	59161
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	280
Principal/CEO	Miss Alison Bagnall
Telephone number	0161 200 1673
Website	<a href="http://www.theapprenticeacademy.co.uk">www.theapprenticeacademy.co.uk</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+		
	40	7	70	20	-	3		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	0							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	0							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
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 teaching and learning, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and quality improvement plan, 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

Ken Fisher, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Shackleton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Judith Hamer	Ofsted Inspector
Pat Hornsby	Ofsted Inspector

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