



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
PeoplePlus Works NI Ltd

Report of an Inspection
in October 2017



The Education and Training Inspectorate
Promoting Improvement

Providing inspection services for:

Department of Education
Department for the Economy
and other commissioning Departments

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1. Context

PeoplePlus Works NI Ltd (PPNI) is a private company, established in October 2014, and is part of Staffline Group PLC which operates across the United Kingdom and Ireland. Governance is provided by a board, led by the group managing director and includes the managing directors of the three businesses in Ireland, PPNI, Diamond Recruitment and Staffline Recruitment Ltd. The organisation acquired Paragon Training Limited in February 2016 and Hugh J O'Boyle Training Limited in August 2016. PPNI is contracted by the Department for the Economy (Department) to provide the ApprenticeshipsNI programme¹.

The managing director of PPNI is supported by four middle managers: the compliance manager, the operations manager, the strategic development manager and the teaching and learning manager, and by the group's shared services team which includes the human resource director. The organisation employs four full-time tutors, who deliver the ApprenticeshipsNI programme, and two administrators.

At the time of the inspection, 38 apprentices were registered across the professional and technical areas of hospitality and catering, and retail and customer service; 35 at level 2 and the remainder at level 3. All were on the legacy² ApprenticeshipsNI 2013 programmes.

None of the apprentices were assessed with additional learning support needs. A small number (8%) of them entered their programme with four or more GSCE passes at grades A* to C or equivalent, including English and mathematics.

2. Views of apprentices

As part of the evaluation of PPNI, arrangements for care and welfare and safeguarding young people, the apprentices completed an online questionnaire prior to the inspection. Of the 38 questionnaires issued, two (5%) were returned, and as a consequence the sample is too low for statistical reporting.

In addition, inspectors met with a small number of apprentices in a focus group. The apprentices report that they had a slow start to their programme, and that during this period contact and communication from the organisation was poor; they also report that contact resumed in the two months prior to the inspection. The apprentices are now more positive about their training and have developed good quality working relationships with their tutors.

3. Focus of the inspection

In order to promote improvement in the interest of all learners, the inspection linked internal and external approaches to evaluate the:

- outcomes for learners;
- quality of provision; and
- effectiveness of the leadership and management.

¹ Programme registration data provided by the organisation at the time of the inspection is included in the Appendix of this report.

² The legacy ApprenticeshipsNI programme introduced in 2013 was superseded by ApprenticeshipsNI 2017.

4. Overall findings of the inspection

Overall effectiveness	Address urgently the significant areas for improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires significant improvement
Quality of provision	Requires significant improvement
Leadership and management	Requires significant improvement

Occupational area/essential skills overall performance levels	
Essential skills	Requires urgent improvement
Hospitality and catering	Important areas for improvement
Retail and customer service	Requires significant improvement

KEY FINDINGS

Strengths

- The good levels of engagement, motivation and enthusiasm demonstrated by most of the apprentices.
- The good relationships fostered with the apprentices by the engaged and committed tutors.
- The extensive range of strategic links and partnerships established with employers.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of the leadership and management of the provision to address urgently the significant areas for improvement.
- Improve the quality of the essential skills provision which requires urgent improvement; the retail and customer services which require significant improvement; and the hospitality and catering which have important areas for improvement.
- Provide appropriate opportunities for staff to undertake continuing professional development activities to support the development of a high quality provision.
- Improve the quality of both the pre-entry advice and guidance, and the careers education, information, advice and guidance provision to ensure the apprentices are recruited to the appropriate programme and supported more effectively to progress to higher levels of education and training.
- Strengthen further the quality improvement planning processes at both organisational level and across the professional and technical areas and the essential skills.
- Address the low overall retention rate (61%), which is an important area for improvement and the slow progress made to date by a majority of the apprentices.

5. Outcomes for learners

The standard of the hospitality and catering apprentices' work is good in the workplace. They are progressively developing their occupational skills; for example, in professional cookery, they are able to cook food to the standard required under supervision. In retail and customer service, due to the slow start, there is little evidence of the impact of the programme on the standards of work achieved by almost all of the apprentices in the workplace .

Overall, the standard of the apprentices' speaking and listening skills is good, however, there are insufficient opportunities to develop these skills further. The standard of most apprentices' written work in their professional and technical area is variable, ranging from good to important areas for improvement. For all of the apprentices, there is not enough feedback on how they could improve and insufficient support is provided for the development of their literacy skills.

The majority of the apprentices in hospitality and catering are progressing well in their learning; they are completing their qualification units at an appropriate pace and are able to progress to the next level. However, a significant minority of them, and almost all of the apprentices in retail and customer service, are making overly slow progress in their learning and this requires significant improvement. In addition, progression is much too slow in the essential skills; the apprentices have all been registered on their programme for at least six months and for some, more than one year, but only a very small number of them have commenced their training.

Over the last three years, the overall retention rate (61%) is an important area for improvement. It is a particular concern that the retention rate for the current apprentices on the level 2 programmes (54%) requires significant improvement, and it requires urgent improvement on the level 3 programmes (25%). While the overall progression rate to employment or further training is outstanding at 93%, it is also a concern that the progression rate from level 2 to level 3 is very poor at 18% and requires urgent improvement.

Most of the apprentices demonstrate positive dispositions to learning, are motivated, and keen to engage in their learning and training. In hospitality and catering, they are able to take on greater responsibility, to use their initiative and work effectively in teams. In retail and customer service, they are not provided with sufficient opportunities to participate actively in the directed training sessions, to take responsibility for their own learning, to develop their research skills, to think critically or to make informed decisions.

The overall achievement rate over the last three years for the professional and technical areas is good at 86%. However, for the majority of the apprentices over the same period, achievement in the essential skills requires urgent improvement.

6. Quality of provision

There are a range of pathways available in hospitality and catering which are matched well to the job roles and the training needs of the apprentices and which provide them with good opportunities to progress to higher level apprenticeship training. There is good communication with most of the employers; they are positive about the quality of the learning and training provided. There are, however, missed opportunities to involve the employers more effectively in setting training targets and to integrate more fully the workplace with the directed training.

In retail and customer service, the curriculum for the apprentices needs to be developed and planned further to provide a more coherent learning programme in order to: consolidate their existing skills and competence; identify opportunities for them to develop and apply new skills and knowledge; and to exploit the good opportunities that exist in the workplace to extend the apprentices' skills and knowledge.

The essential skills curriculum planning requires urgent improvement with no clear strategy for its delivery. Guidance and support requires significant improvement with initial and diagnostic assessments not taking place in a timely enough manner. Currently, the apprentices who have started their essential skills receive approximately two sessions each month, which is insufficient. This delivery model needs to be reviewed urgently.

The personal training plans (PTPs) and associated review processes are too variable and require significant improvement and development. Most of the PTPs contain incorrect information on the apprentices' training periods and there are inconsistencies across the documents in relation to qualifications and essential skills requirements. Milestones need to be reviewed and linked more clearly to the achievement of specific units, and to provide an outline training plan.

Whilst the apprentices are aware of the progression pathway to level 3, overall, the careers education, information, advice and guidance provision does not take sufficient account of the context of the apprentices' professional and technical area. The programme needs to be developed to ensure they are fully aware of the employment and progression opportunities available to them and how these can be accessed through associated personal development and career planning.

Planning for learning in the professional and technical areas and the essential skills requires significant improvement; it needs to be developed further to include a suitable range of learning, teaching and training approaches and strategies to engage the apprentices more actively in their learning. An appropriate range of formative and summative assessment methods, including practical tasks, written work, online tasks and group work activities, where appropriate, need to be planned and implemented to effectively assess the development of the apprentices' knowledge and skills.

The quality of most of the learning, teaching and training is an important area for improvement. While a minority of the directed training sessions observed were of a good quality, most are overly tutor-led and consequently the apprentices are not sufficiently engaged.

Based on the evidence available at the time of the inspection, the care and welfare arrangements do not impact positively enough on the learning, teaching and outcomes for the apprentices. Relationships between the tutors and apprentices are good, the tutors demonstrate commitment to working with and supporting the needs of the apprentices. There has, however, been a high turnover in staff which has impacted negatively on retention, progression and achievement.

7. Leadership and management

The strategic leadership of the provision requires significant improvement. PPNI has undergone considerable change over the past eighteen months, having acquired two work-based learning supplier organisations in 2016, and then ceased delivery of the Training for Success programme in August 2017. The considerable management and staffing changes over this period have resulted in instability and have impacted negatively on the capacity of the organisation to provide a high quality provision for the apprentices. Lines of communication have not been clear enough across the management and staff teams, resulting in a lack of rigor in the quality assurance processes and the procedures to monitor, track, review and evaluate the provision.

While there is a clear vision for the future growth of the apprenticeship provision there is a need to develop further the strategic planning for the expansion in provision, particularly around curriculum planning, the quality of the learning, teaching and training, resources and staffing. Consequently, the organisation is going through a change management process which includes, for example, a review of the staffing structure; this has identified the need for realigned staff roles and responsibilities.

While the management have developed an essential skills strategy and are currently reviewing the delivery arrangements, a more focused essential skills policy is required which clearly sets out the responsibilities of the essential skills tutors, the professional and technical tutors, apprentices and employers and which also includes an appropriate and coherent delivery model that reflects the demands of the new curriculum and the associated assessment arrangements. The model needs to ensure that all of the apprentices commence their essential skills towards the start of their programme and receive sufficient directed training time and support to enable them to progress and achieve.

PPNI have an extensive range of strategic links and partnerships with employers which are being used well to promote the new apprenticeship contract.

The staff development programme needs to be developed further to ensure that the tutors can access more extensive continuing professional development opportunities in their professional and technical area, as well as in learning, teaching and training, to include the more effective use of information and learning technology.

The self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are important areas for improvement. The managers and tutors do not make sufficient evidence-based judgements on the quality of leadership and management, learning, teaching and training, or the standards and attainments of the apprentices. Management information is not used well enough to analyse key performance indicators and to use the data more effectively to inform decision-making.

An action plan for each of the professional and technical areas and essential skills needs to be developed with specific and measureable targets for improvement, key milestone points and which are actioned and monitored closely to improve the provision and to ensure legacy issues are addressed appropriately.

8. Safeguarding

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of inspection, the arrangements for safeguarding young people and adults at risk reflect broadly the guidance issued by the Department. However, the organisation needs to:

- review and update the safeguarding policies and procedures in line with current practice and ensure these are relevant to the apprenticeship programme; and
- ensure all training is specific to the safeguarding roles in the organisation and are in line with best practice.

9. Overall effectiveness

PPNI needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the apprentices.

The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection within 12 months.

Programme registrations

Table 1 - Current registrations by programme

Programme	Numbers of registrations	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI L2	35	92%
ApprenticeshipsNI L3	3	8%

Table 2 - Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Customer Service	6	16%
Hospitality & Catering	16	42%
Retail	16	42%

Table 3 - Qualifications of current apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	Apprentices (%)
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	8%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	8%
(%) of learners with GCSE English or equivalent at Grades A*-C	21%
(%) of learners with GCSE mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	15%
(%) of learners with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	8%
(%) of learners with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	32%

B. Inspection methodology and evidence base

The ETI's Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework is available on the ETI website <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation-4>.

Five ETI inspectors observed eight apprentices in six directed training sessions; visited eleven apprentices in their workplace; and interviewed four in focus group meetings. Discussions were held with the managing director, the human resource director, the operations manager, the strategic development director and the teaching and learning manager, and four tutors. Samples of the apprentices' work and personal training plans and tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans were examined. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant documentation were scrutinised.

C. Reporting terms used by the Education and Training Inspectorate

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The ETI use the following performance levels when reporting on Outcomes for learners, Quality of Provision and on Leadership and Management.

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Important area(s) for improvement
Requires significant improvement
Requires urgent improvement

Overall effectiveness

The ETI use one of the following inspection outcomes when evaluating the overall effectiveness of the organisation:

The organisation has a high level of capacity for sustained improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation demonstrates the capacity to identify and bring about improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor how the organisation sustains improvement.
The organisation needs to address (an) important area(s) for improvement in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the area(s) for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.
The organisation needs to address urgently the significant areas for improvement identified in the interest of all the learners. The ETI will monitor and report on the organisation's progress in addressing the areas for improvement. There will be a formal follow-up inspection.

Key Performance Indictors and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments measured over the full duration of their programme.
Achievement	The percentage of participants who completed their targeted individual outcomes.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who achieved positive progression.

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