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12 May 2017

Ms Anita Butt
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Dear Ms Butt

Short inspection of PGL Training Ltd (PGL)

Following the short inspection on 20 and 21 April 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The inspection was the first short inspection carried out since the provider was judged to be good in July 2013.

This provider continues to be good.

Since the previous inspection, PGL's management team has successfully managed substantial growth of the business and a large increase in the number of learners, while maintaining the good quality of its provision. PGL's main business remains the provision of intermediate and advanced apprenticeship programmes. The majority of these are still in construction trades, but PGL also now offers apprenticeships in hairdressing, beauty therapy, warehousing and a wider range of business and administration programmes.

PGL's management team has worked hard to deal with the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection, and with some success. A good range of performance data is now generated, making it easier to identify learners' progress and respond promptly and effectively to any signs of underperformance. More recently, the management team has focused strongly on reversing a decline in the number of apprentices completing their programmes within the planned timescale.

Since the previous inspection PGL's management team has further developed close working partnerships with local, regional and national employers operating in the region. This ensures high-quality job opportunities for apprentices, the great majority of whom enter full-time employment after completing their programme.

The management team is aware, through effective self-assessment and quality improvement practice, that some aspects of the provision have not improved as much as planned, including the achievement of all learners, aspects of target setting and the introduction and exploration with apprentices of themes involving equality, diversity and British values.

Safeguarding is effective.

The management team ensures that PGL's safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and takes appropriate actions to safeguard learners, including thorough risk assessments of workplaces. Learners feel safe and are safe at the training centre and at work. Employers recognise and appreciate that PGL's assessors have a strong focus on the health and safety of apprentices.

All apprentices speak confidently about the purpose and value of good health and safety practice at work, including the correct use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Construction learners appreciate the importance of maintaining personal fitness given the physical demands of their industry. Apprentices wear PPE properly and use equipment safely. Hair and barbering apprentices know and abide by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations; they are taught well how to use chemical products safely and identify contra-indications by skin type and sensitivity. All apprentices have a good understanding of how to work and stay safe online, including protecting sensitive information and passwords.

Existing and potential PGL staff, including those who are not directly involved in training, undergo Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. A PGL senior manager efficiently administers and monitors the central DBS record. Apprentices understand to whom they can report safeguarding issues, and are confident that staff will investigate any such concerns. PGL's senior managers have commissioned a local specialist company to develop a recruitment policy based on the 2016 government guidance on keeping children safe in education. Senior managers have recognised that the arrangements for ensuring that safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty practices are up to date need to be more thorough.

The great majority of PGL staff have completed 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding and child protection training during the last 18 months; the few who have not were scheduled for planned training during the week after inspection. Hairdressing learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism and can explain how they might identify whether staff and clients are at risk; however, the majority of other apprentices' understanding of these themes needs further development. PGL's 'Prevent' duty action plan includes general risk assessments but does not include an analysis of any specific potential risks to its learners at or beyond the training centre.

Inspection findings

- PGL's quality improvement arrangements are effective. Managers produce a thorough and perceptive annual self-assessment report which is used well to improve the quality of provision. PGL managers' evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement is honest and insightful; their analysis leads directly to clear action planning, which in turn leads to demonstrable improvements in the provision, such as recent improvements in apprentices' timely achievement. PGL's development plan is realistic and demonstrates a good understanding of the training sectors in which it operates. The plan includes a clear analysis of the strategies needed to sustain the business and the quality of its provision for the future. Managers use a comprehensive schedule of teaching and learning observations well to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The peer to peer reviews of classroom practice and effectiveness are particularly useful.
- Close and effective partnerships with employers are a particular strength of PGL's provision. Managers have developed, and maintain, strong working relationships with an increasingly broad range of small- and large-scale regional and national employers working in the South West of England, particularly in construction trades. Many of the employers in smaller construction companies employing PGL apprentices are former PGL apprentices themselves. PGL managers have developed extensive new working partnerships with hairdressing salons and have further increased the number of public and private sector businesses that PGL works with.
- Employers respect and value their links with PGL. Employers report that PGL managers are highly responsive to meeting their specific training requirements; for example, managers developed update training in the use of abrasive wheels, and new skills training programmes in tiling and decorating. Employers are encouraged to choose relevant units which apprentices should complete which best meet their business needs. Most employers feel well supported and informed by PGL, which in turn helps them to support their apprentices effectively.
- The quality of teaching and learning remains good; most apprentices are developing good practical skills and making good progress. Assessors conduct frequent and regular reviews which help to keep apprentices on task and motivated, and employers well informed of the progress their apprentices are making.
- Assessors and employers provide very good on-the-job job training and skills coaching for construction trade apprentices. These apprentices are working alongside, and are supervised well by, skilled sector professionals; apprentices are expected to work to high commercial and industry standards. Apprentices have good opportunities to practise their site and tool skills in all construction settings. The standard of these apprentices' work is high. Some brickwork apprentices are placed with subcontractors for a prestigious national housebuilding company and must meet particularly high standards. Others are working on diverse housing projects in the Exeter area and gaining experience

laying different types of bricks, blocks and stone pediments reflecting modern and conservation designs.

- Plumbing apprentices are encouraged to work in different parts of their companies to ensure they gain a broad experience of the plumbing trade and also learn complementary skills such as how to carry out basic site joinery, tiling and decoration to meet customers' needs.
- On-the-job training in PGL's Exeter training centre is good. Apprentices enjoy their weekly sessions. In one electrical session, the teacher skilfully explained abstract detail about electrical regulations with reference to workplace scenarios that allowed learners to contribute their personal site experiences. Trainers use questioning techniques well to determine apprentices' depth of knowledge and skills. PGL's management team has ensured that hairdressing apprentices also have the benefit of off-the-job training facilities by opening a specialist 'Academy' in which apprentices can hone their theoretical and practical skills away from the pressures of the work environment.
- Business administration and management apprentices are trained exclusively in the workplace. Employers report good development in the confidence and skills of business and administration apprentices, including customer service, complaint handling, and the quality of written communications. Business and administration apprentices who completed their programmes in the past year took part in a written survey in which all but a very few wrote how pleased they were with the quality of teaching, learning and support from their assessor.
- PGL's management team has focused well on developing PGL's arrangements for observing teaching and learning; these have led to demonstrable improvements in the standards of training and learning. One assessor explained how she had received very positive feedback and support through the observation process which had helped improve her tracking of apprentices' progress.
- Assessment practice for plumbing and electrical apprentices is thorough; assessors provide helpful guidance for apprentices on how their work can be improved further, particularly spelling and grammar. However, in brickwork, assessors focus too much on apprentices meeting the required standards for the qualification, and do not encourage further improvement, including in their written English skills. Poor spelling and grammar in written work often go uncorrected. Similarly, assessors are not consistent in the quality of target setting. Too often the target set for an apprentice is simply to complete a unit and assessors do not use more complex and individualised target setting to promote deeper skills development or understanding. Assessors do not involve all employers directly in reviews, and in a very few cases employers sign off progress reviews without any involvement at all.
- Most apprentices are now making good progress. A significant minority of construction trades apprentices are on track to complete their programmes well within the planned timescale. All other construction learners are on target to attain their qualifications within the period specified. Apprentices' work is often of very good quality; for example meeting the high standards of, and scrutiny from, national housebuilders, conservation officers and clients such as the National Trust.

- The great majority of apprentices become full-time, permanent employees once they have completed their programmes. A high proportion of trainees move on to apprenticeships but very few of these trainees have taken or passed functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics before doing so.
- The proportion of PGL apprentices who completed their programme was high in 2015/16, and well above the national rate; however, the proportion completing within their planned timescale was low. PGL managers are taking effective actions to ensure that all apprentices complete when planned. PGL data indicates improvement in the year so far, particularly for 16 to 18-year-olds on intermediate and advanced apprenticeship programmes. PGL managers recognise that they still have more work to do to improve the timely and overall attainment of specific but small cohorts of learners.
- Construction trades apprentices' mathematics skills are well developed. Electrical and plumbing apprentices have a good understanding of the scientific principles of resistance, current flow and heat transfer theory. However, their written English skills are not being developed as well. Advanced business administration and management apprentices develop good, business-relevant written English through workplace activities such as writing to clients, sending company-wide emails using professional business language or keeping minutes of meetings. Their written work is corrected effectively by assessors. Hairdressing apprentices develop good employability skills, including the use of English and mathematics. For example, they discuss with confidence how to calculate ratios for mixing hair products, work out timings for hair treatments and use metric and imperial measures in hair cutting.
- Assessors are not exploring apprentices' understanding of equality, diversity or British values such as democracy and tolerance in sufficient depth during reviews. Assessors select from a standard set of questions to check apprentices' basic understanding, but little further discussion or exploration takes place and apprentices' understanding of these themes is consequently cursory. PGL managers recognise in their self-assessment that they must further investigate and implement ways of promoting equality, diversity and British values in the course of teaching and learning.

Next steps for the provider

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- timely and overall completion and achievement is uniformly high for all learners
- assessors encourage and support all apprentices to succeed to the best of their ability, by setting them challenging targets
- assessors involve all employers in reviews of apprentices' progress
- assessors explore and discuss the themes of equality, diversity and British values more thoroughly during apprentices' reviews
- the arrangements for ensuring that safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty practices are up to date are thorough.

I am copying this letter to the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Nick Crombie
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Ofsted inspectors, assisted by you, PGL's Operations Director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors met with managers, apprentices and employers around the South West of England. Inspectors observed teaching, learning, assessments and learners' progress reviews. Inspectors reviewed key documents, including those relating to self-assessment, quality improvement plans, safeguarding and learners' achievements and progression.