

Inspection of Professional Apprenticeships Ltd

Inspection dates: 15 to 18 August 2023

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Apprenticeships	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Professional Apprenticeships Ltd is an independent training provider based in the south of Bristol. It trains apprentices in several industries, including marketing and information and communication technology.

At the time of the inspection, there were 154 apprentices, 32 of whom were aged between 16 and 18. Just over four fifths of apprentices were studying digital marketing, information communication technician or business administration at level 3. The remaining apprentices were studying associate project manager and marketing executive at level 4 or operations departmental manager at level 5. Nearly all apprentices are based in and around Bristol. There were no apprentices with education, health and care plans.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices thoroughly enjoy their training because leaders take great care to match them with an employer that will develop their character and interests. Apprentices quickly develop deep and complex new knowledge and practical skills. As a result, apprentices become highly valued and useful members of staff, quickly carrying out meaningful tasks independently.

Apprentices' attitudes to their learning are exemplary. They are highly motivated and develop their knowledge and skills beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship. For example, level 3 digital marketing apprentices participate in wider activities, proudly representing the provider and their employers at corporate networking events. These apprentices communicate and interact professionally with current and future clients to support their development, improve their confidence, and gain a comprehensive understanding of the sector they work in. As such, they are very well prepared for their next steps in employment or further study.

Apprentices are highly respectful of their peers and tutors. They openly share their experiences of applying their learning at work without reprisal or ridicule. For example, level 3 business administration apprentices openly critique each other's work in a supportive, non-judgemental manner.

Apprentices feel safe while in training and in their workplaces. This is because managers and tutors make sure that the training environment is positive and that apprentices are not subject to any type of bullying, harassment or discrimination. Apprentices find the provider team approachable and responsive in its contact and communication. As a result, apprentices feel valued and well listened to.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed highly effective and productive relationships with a range of external stakeholders, including employers, charities and other training providers. Leaders work diligently with employers to carefully and meticulously plan a highly ambitious curriculum for all apprentices, including those with additional support needs. Staff support apprentices exceptionally well from the pre-application stage through to post-completion. They make sure that all aspiring apprentices have access to the training opportunities they need. For example, staff help those seeking an apprenticeship to further enhance their existing knowledge and skills by working with employers who offer work experience prior to committing to an apprenticeship. This particularly applies to those who have been disadvantaged by the pandemic and other socio-economic factors in their locality and have missed opportunities for work experience at school. As a result, apprentices from all backgrounds can study an apprenticeship and learn the knowledge and skills they need to become valuable employees.

Tutors work with employers highly effectively to plan and sequence the curriculum for apprentices. They coordinate apprentices' training well so that they make significant and substantial progress from their starting points. For example, level 3 digital marketing apprentices working in marketing agencies often need to understand 'pay per click' early in the apprenticeship. In these cases, apprentices undertake shadowing of experienced colleagues before they are required to learn the technical content of the concept. As a result of this practical experience, they quickly gain technical knowledge and apply this to their own work.

Leaders make sure that tutors undertake comprehensive and frequent progress reviews in which employers, tutors and apprentices discuss apprentices' achievements with them and agree next steps. For example, level 3 digital marketing apprentices have progressed from supporting a manager to develop and implement an email marketing campaign to producing their own with support before working more independently. As a result, apprentices have a coherent learning experience that links the training they carry out at the provider with what they are learning at work.

Leaders make sure that apprentices move on to a wide range of high-quality destinations as a result of the training they receive. For example, a large number of apprentices stay with their employer, and a significant minority gain promotions. Of the apprentices who do leave, almost all remain in the technology or business sectors.

Leaders use thorough and well-considered quality assurance processes to make sure that the curriculum the apprentices study is highly effective. Leaders have a deep and comprehensive understanding of the sectors they work in and the need to develop digital and business skills due to the skills shortage. As a result, they are able to meet the needs of sector employers well.

For the vast majority of apprentices, leaders make good use of additional qualifications to enhance the apprentice's knowledge and skills and strengthen their employability. For example, level 3 information communication technician tutors include a network architecture element in the apprenticeship. This is because it meets the needs of employers whose businesses are focused on installing, maintaining and commissioning networks. As a result, apprentices build the wider technical knowledge and skills they need to meet the range of employment opportunities available in the sector.

Tutors have expert knowledge of the subjects they teach and are well qualified. Leaders place great emphasis on further developing tutors' subject knowledge and teaching skills. For example, tutors are supported to undertake research in their relevant sectors. All tutors have received training in how to develop learners' knowledge sufficiently well to enable them to achieve high grades. Leaders monitor and evaluate the impact of tutors' development effectively. They use the information gained from this to inform their future training needs and plans. As a result, apprentices receive continually improving, high-quality teaching that develops their

knowledge, skills and behaviours. Consequently, nine tenths of apprentices achieve a merit or distinction in their final assessments.

Tutors use a range of highly effective teaching methods to present information and demonstrate skills. This enhances apprentices' understanding of key concepts and ensures they can retain these in their long-term memory. For example, tutors use skilful questioning to check apprentices' understanding. They expertly coordinate group work and use well-designed quizzes to help apprentices recall and contextualise their learning.

Tutors use workplace scenarios to help operations departmental manager level 5 apprentices analyse difficult workplace conversations about poor performance. Apprentices on this programme develop strategies and vocabulary to use when having difficult conversations. As a result, apprentices greatly improve their confidence in these interactions.

Leaders and tutors make sure that apprentices who need to achieve their functional skills qualifications are well supported to do so. Tutors use high-quality resources to support the functional skills curriculum and support apprentices with additional needs well. This results in around three fifths of students passing first time.

Apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills extensively throughout their apprenticeship. For example, level 3 digital marketing apprentices reduce their reliance on managers in the workplace to check campaigns for grammatical errors prior to launch. Level 3 business administration apprentices develop their mathematical skills when applying budgeting skills in real-life situations. As a result, apprentices continually improve their written and oral communication and understand mathematical concepts relevant to their job roles.

Tutors use assessment highly effectively to identify any gaps in apprentices' learning. For example, level 3 digital marketing tutors use discussion and research projects to establish what apprentices have learned and can apply in the workplace. Any gaps are quickly communicated with employers to ensure that apprentices have the opportunities they need to further develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, both tutors and employers are fully informed as to how to support apprentices to maximise the progress they make.

Tutors provide highly effective, constructive and timely feedback on apprentices' work. For example, level 4 associate project manager apprentices improve their business plans to be more succinct and make better use of professional terminology. As a result, the standard of work apprentices produce is high, and their written work increases in sophistication, accuracy and content knowledge over time.

Leaders and tutors provide an extensive range of opportunities for apprentices to explore options for progression. Tutors use careers booklets and organise careers talks and discussions about specific job vacancies that relate to the topics being taught. As a result, apprentices have a secure knowledge of the range of opportunities available for career progression and further study.

Most apprentices achieve their qualifications in the expected timescales. Around four fifths of apprentices are expected to successfully achieve their apprenticeship this year. All apprentices who sit their final exams achieve at least a pass, with most achieving a merit or distinction. Tutors provide effective support for apprentices who have exceeded their expected end date to catch up and achieve, and they do so. However, achievement rates in 2020/21 were lower. This was due to a large levy-paying employer removing all apprentices from their apprenticeship programme during the pandemic.

Tutors develop apprentices' understanding of life in modern Britain highly effectively, skilfully linking this to their careers and lives. Tutors use a wide range of activities and resources very well to ensure that apprentices know how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices can apply their understanding in the workplace, where they respect the opinions of colleagues and develop skills in working with clients from a diverse business customer base sensitively.

Those responsible for governance understand the provider's strengths and weaknesses very well. They are very aware of the improvements in apprentices' achievement and continue to challenge leaders to set and monitor ambitious targets to maintain this advance. Governors support and strengthen the provider's leadership highly effectively and have been instrumental in shaping the provider's strategy, focusing on limiting the curriculum offer to those sectors they have expert knowledge of. Governors help to ensure that the provider meets its statutory responsibilities and encourage leaders to seek and successfully achieve the 'Leaders in Safeguarding' award.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that comprehensive safeguarding arrangements are in place to ensure the safety and well-being of all apprentices.

Leaders apply robust processes to ensure the safe recruitment of staff and act appropriately on the information arising from these processes. The safeguarding team consists of five designated safeguarding leads, all of whom are trained to level 4. All full-time staff are trained in mental health first aid. As a result, they are able to support apprentices effectively to maintain good mental health. Managers use their well-developed links with local external agencies to ensure that safeguarding and 'Prevent' practices are kept up to date.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2625247
Address	Filwood Green Business Park, 1 Filwood Park Lane Bristol BS4 1ET
Contact number	0117 4224000
Website	www.professionalapprenticeships.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Carina Bush
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and curriculum manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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