

PfL Limited

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. Pfl is a registered charity and a private company located in Speke, Merseyside. Pfl was created to provide a shared training facility that responded to local needs and to help attract more businesses to the Merseyside region.
2. The organisation contracts with Merseyside LSC to provide work-based learning, Train to Gain and learndirect provision across Merseyside. Pfl also holds substantial European Social Fund contracts in partnership with St Helens College and Liverpool John Moores University. Pfl offers apprenticeships for 54 local employers, mainly in the engineering and manufacturing sector. In addition, Pfl is involved in a range of other training, education and business development activities in the region.
3. The company is managed by a chief executive who reports to a board and a charity board. The chief executive is supported by six managers. Pfl employs 46 staff of whom 14 are directly involved in the training and assessment of work based learners. Pfl has three work-based learning assessors in engineering, two of whom are also internal verifiers. The business is an Engineering and Marine Training Authority Awards Limited approved assessment centre.
4. Most engineering apprentices spend their first year attending off-the-job training which is subcontracted to St Helens College. Subsequent years on programme are spent in workplaces locally. Learners are recruited through referrals from Connexions, careers advisers and directly from employers as well as direct recruitment through Pfl's own recruitment campaigns. Most of the Train to Gain learners have their training subcontracted to NVQ Training and Consultancy. Training for plumbing programmes is subcontracted to North West Training Council. Only the engineering and manufacturing technologies work-based provision was included in this inspection.
5. Pfl currently has around 65 advanced apprentices and 63 apprentices, all of whom are employed across the engineering, business administration, information technology and electro-technical sectors. Of these, 55 are engineering advanced apprentices and 39 are engineering apprentices. Pfl also has 353 learners on Train to Gain programmes and 265 learners accessing 509 learndirect courses. In addition Pfl deliver training direct to employers on a full commercial basis. Learners are initially assessed for literacy and numeracy skills and also undergo psychometric testing. Approximately 70% of Pfl's business is government-funded training.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all satisfactory as is the provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies. The promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. Pfl's capacity to improve is satisfactory. Advanced apprenticeship success rates have declined but remain substantially above national rates. Apprenticeship success rates remain low. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory as is the quality of provision. Support for learners is satisfactory. Quality assurance arrangements are new but are starting to improve provision, particularly the quality of progress reviews which were poor and are now satisfactory or better. Pfl uses feedback from learners and employers well to monitor the provision. Pfl receives reports on the observations of teaching and learning from its subcontractors and uses this information well to monitor the quality of its subcontracted training.
8. The self-assessment process is thorough and includes the views of staff and of the subcontracting college. The self-assessment report identifies most strengths and areas for improvement. Inspection findings matched the main grades awarded within the self-assessment report. However, it overstated the value to learners in some of its strengths. Pfl's has an adequate development plan and has taken appropriate action to resolve some weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

Key strengths

- High success rates on advanced apprenticeships
- Good off-the-job resources for learning
- Good induction
- Effective monitoring of subcontractors
- Good strategic partnerships with employers

Key areas for improvement

- Low success rates on apprenticeship programmes
- Some poor assessment practices
- Weak aspects of quality assurance
- Insufficient use of management information
- No action to widen participation

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Learners' success rates on the advanced apprenticeship programme framework are good. In 2004/05, 87% of learners were successful, increasing to 94% in 2005/06 and declining to 75% in 2006/07. Advanced apprenticeship success rates, while dropping sharply in 2006/07 are significantly above the national rates. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.
10. The general level of skills development by learners is satisfactory. While learners are at work they develop the required skills for the job. Some learners exceed the required skill levels and have wider responsibilities at work and less supervision. For example, some electrical learners work as service engineers maintaining customer equipment, on their own, at the customers premises. These learners interact well with customers and are developing good communication and social skills.
11. Learners' success rates on the apprenticeship programme are low. In 2005/06 67% of apprentices were successful. This dropped to 46% in 2006/07 and is now well below the national average. This was not identified by self-assessment. Timely success rates are low on both programmes.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Off-the-job resources for training, learning and assessment are good. The subcontractor's workshops are very well equipped with the latest technology such as programmable machine tools and equipment of industrial standard. Learners on the performing engineering operations programme use industrial standard laths, milling machines and welding equipment. The electrical workshop has the latest test sets and diagnostic rigs.
13. The college has spacious and well-furnished classrooms. An excellent range of aids to support learning includes a well equipped information technology suite comprising computer workstations with full internet access. The college library has a well stocked engineering section with a wide range of engineering textbooks, magazines and trade journals. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.
14. On the technical certificate programme, learners complete challenging assignments that are well reinforced by practical skill development in the college workshops. For example, some fabrication and welding advanced apprentices

have produced test pieces that meet the high standard of European coded regulations.

15. Literacy, numeracy and language skill assignments at level 1 and 2 are satisfactory and in most cases integrated with engineering topics. Fabrication and welding learners are asked to work out a materials cutting list for a given project, Electrical learners are asked to produce letters of application for engineering vacancies and engineering learners are asked to work out the space requirements for a standard machine workshop.
16. Learners' portfolios of evidence are satisfactory but they are over reliant on job cards, drawings and witness testimony. Portfolios lack individuality and a sufficiently diverse range of evidence to reflect their experiences and skills development.
17. Some aspects of the assessment of the NVQ level 3 programme are poor. PFL has qualified assessors but they do not carry out assessment by observation in the workplace. They overly rely on the testimony of workplace supervisors who are not qualified as assessors. Learners at most employers are competent. However, PFL assessors use an insufficient range of checks to provide evidence for this. This area for improvement has not been identified by internal verification. PFL internal verifiers do not sample learners' NVQ level 3 portfolios until the end of the learners' programme, leaving insufficient time to remedy any weak assessment practices.
18. Links between on- and off-the-job training are satisfactory. Learners employed by the larger companies have good opportunities to experience a range of tasks in the workplace through secondment to various parts of the factory.
19. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners undergo a thorough online diagnostic test to establish learners' literacy and numeracy levels. Learners identified as requiring additional support to complete their qualification are offered the opportunity of support by specialist tutors.
20. The range of programmes are satisfactory. PFL offers programmes in general engineering maintenance, electrical engineering, and fabrication and welding. Ample opportunities exist for learners to gain additional qualifications and go on to higher education. Many advanced apprentices have taken this opportunity and have progressed well and are now on the higher national certificate programmes. Programmes generally meet the needs of learners, employers and the local community. Learners have good opportunities to progress from apprentice programme to the advanced apprentice programme.
21. Support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors frequently visit workplaces to support learners in the collection of evidence for their NVQ portfolios. An informative support and guidance centre is located at PFL's premises where learners can drop in and get useful advice from experienced, very supportive and well informed staff.

22. The induction of learners is good. A comprehensive three day induction takes place for engineering learners. This includes reference to the guidance on the grievance and appeals procedure, equal opportunities and a thorough presentation to develop learners understanding of risk assessment and health and safety in the workplace. Personal protective equipment is issued and learners receive instruction in its use and maintenance. Learners have ample opportunity to discuss the requirements of their qualification with experienced work-based assessors. Parents and employers are also invited to take part in these discussions. Some inductions have included factory tours and an off-road vehicle experience for learners. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.
23. Progress reviews are now satisfactory. They take place every 12 weeks with the employer in attendance. Progress on all aspects of the programme is discussed and agreed.
24. Adequate pastoral support is provided on personal issues. Target-setting for qualification progression is satisfactory with suitable action plans to overcome slow progress and challenging targets to be completed before the next review.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

25. Leadership and management are satisfactory. PFL's new management team have quickly developed good communications across the organisation and with external partners. They have frequent management team meetings that carefully record discussions. However, the records of meetings often fail to clearly record the progress made against previously set targets and actions.
26. PFL works closely with subcontractors to provide and organise training. The monitoring of subcontractors is very effective. PFL have detailed service level agreements in place with subcontractors which include detailed requirements for quality assurance. PFL receives regular reports from the subcontractors. These reports are used well to inform learner progress reviews.
27. PFL has very good strategic partnerships with key employers. Major employers in the region support PFL through their engagement in apprenticeship training and through the provision of equipment and financial support for the training centre. Employers allow PFL apprentices, who are not their own employees, to access factory tours to gain greater understanding of key engineering concepts. Employers play an effective role in both the charity board and the board of PFL. They help to shape the future direction and ensure the company is meeting the needs of employers and learners.

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28. The procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. PFL and college staff are trained in *Every Child Matters*. Appropriate checks have been carried out on all staff through the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff development and staff appraisal arrangements are satisfactory.
 29. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. They receive training at their induction. At progress review meetings, they are asked if they have any concerns relating to equality of opportunity, but their understanding of the subject is not further developed or promoted.
 30. PFL have recently appointed a new quality manager and introduced a range of new quality improvement arrangements. These have started to be effective in identifying some areas for improvement. In particular, recent changes have been made to improve the standard of target-setting during progress reviews. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of these measures on learner success rates. Key weaknesses in quality assurance and in widening participation identified at the previous inspection have still not been fully resolved.
 31. Management information is insufficiently used. PFL has recently purchased a proprietary management information system but this has not yet been used to provide key management reports particularly related to the success rates of learners.
 32. The company's approach to equality of opportunity is inadequate. PFL takes no effective action to widen the participation of learners from under-represented groups. This is an area for development identified in the self-assessment report and was a weakness at the previous inspection. There have been no activities specifically aimed at raising participation by under-represented groups. Equality of opportunity is not systematically discussed by the board of directors and does not appear in the agenda or minutes of management meetings. An equal opportunities and diversity committee has been discontinued. The procedure for monitoring statistics on equality of opportunity is available, but not used to monitor trends or set targets. Equality and diversity staff training and development is insufficient.

What learners like:

- The practical nature of the training
- Learning alongside more experienced colleagues
- Working on high specification equipment and machines
- 'The Pfl staff and the people you work with are helpful and supportive'
- Opportunity to gain recognised qualifications and learn new skills while working
- Builds self-confidence
- Good career opportunities
- 'Being treated like an adult and with respect'
- Problem-solving exercises

What learners think could improve:

- 'Sometimes maintenance engineers are too busy so we can only stand and watch'
- The relevance of some theory work
- More practical training
- The travel required to off-the-job training
- The poor quality of some teacher handouts
- 'I'd like a clearer understanding of literacy and numeracy skills, and proxy arrangements'
- More access to computers in the workplace
- 'I do not understand some of my deadlines and work targets '

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by Pfl 2004 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	23	87%	48%	87%	34%
		timely	24	79%	31%	79%	22%
	2005/06	overall	18	94%	53%	94%	44%
		timely	16	94%	34%	94%	27%
	2006/07	overall	12	75%	64%	75%	58%
		timely	15	27%	43%	27%	37%
Apprenticeships	2004/05	overall	4	50%	51%	25%	39%
		timely	9	22%	29%	11%	22%
	2005/06	overall	18	72%	58%	67%	52%
		timely	16	50%	38%	44%	34%
	2006/07	overall	35	60%	65%	46%	61%
		timely	54	44%	47%	28%	44%

- * Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
- ** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'