

Linden Management (UK) Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	1278590
Name of lead inspector:	Vicki Locke, His Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Linden Management (UK) Limited (Linden) was inspected in October 2021. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Linden is a Nottinghamshire based independent learning provider that focuses on apprenticeships. At the time of the visit, there were 404 apprentices on a wide variety of courses, including customer service, early years, team leading, management, and supply chain. Most current training is for level 3 team leaders/supervisors. The majority of apprentices are adults, with 36 apprentices aged 18 and under.

Themes

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring apprentices benefit from enough well-planned training so that they can gain, practise and master the skills and knowledge they need for their next steps? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have thought carefully about how they plan apprentices' training. Each course now has a useful outline curriculum plan that identifies logically what apprentices need to learn. Leaders adapt these plans to meet employers' and apprentices' needs. Employers rightly value this flexibility, as it helps to embed company approaches into apprentices' training. In a few cases, experts from the employer's company provide helpful additional training that complements what apprentices learn with their trainer. For example, finance directors provide insight into corporate financial management.

Leaders plan for most apprentices to attend a monthly one-day workshop and one-to-one review meeting. Leaders take time to ensure that line managers understand fully the commitment they make to provide apprentices with their off-the-job training time. As a result, most apprentices now receive this valuable time.

Despite this, the plans for what apprentices need to do between their monthly workshops and meetings are not clear enough. In too many cases, the targets for what apprentices should do in this time are reactive rather than proactive. Trainers often direct apprentices to write reflectively about what they do at work, or to

complete tasks to gather evidence for their portfolio. This limits opportunities for apprentices to practise, and master, the specific knowledge and skills they need to develop.

Most employers know and understand what apprentices need to do to apply their new learning at work. For example, coaching apprentices have mentors identified in the workplace for them to work with. However, trainers do not always involve employers enough in the forward planning of apprentices' off-the-job training. As a result, employers do not always know what opportunities they should provide to help apprentices apply and practise their knowledge and skills, such as for apprentices who study finance but do not manage a budget.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring trainers clearly define the standards of performance they expect and provide assessment that helps apprentices to meet these high standards? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have helped trainers to develop and improve their approaches to assessment.

Trainers now plan specific assessment activities for apprentices to complete alongside each block of learning. Trainers identify a range of assessment activities that allow apprentices to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and behaviours. Trainers now use a broader range of assessment methods with their apprentices. When trainers use these methods well, they help apprentices to explore successfully how to apply what they learn in the workplace and to think about what impact this has on their job roles. For example, apprentice team leaders learn and practise how to better manage team meetings and agendas.

At the start of the course, trainers make final assessment expectations clear to apprentices. Trainers model tasks and activities that mirror these assessments throughout the course. This helps prepare apprentices well. Most apprentices understand the standard they need to meet to successfully achieve a merit or distinction grade.

Most trainers provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their work. These trainers recognise where apprentices' work is strong and where it needs to improve. For many apprentices, trainers' feedback during the duration of their course helps them to improve their understanding and standards of English. However, a small number of trainers give overly positive feedback on work that has not been demanding enough.

A minority of trainers do not expect enough from their apprentices and often give too much help. When this happens, the professional discussions or questioning are

too easy, and apprentices rely too much on the expertise of their trainers. These apprentices are not able to demonstrate what they know and can do.

What progress have leaders and managers made in improving the focus of quality improvement/assurance so that these activities positively impact on apprentices' experiences? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have strengthened the focus of quality improvement/assurance activity.

Leaders now adopt a more rigorous approach to their onboarding process and their early discussions with employers. Leaders attend employers' induction days and make clear their expectations about training requirements. As a result, most apprentices now receive their full off-the-job entitlement.

Employers are largely positive about the way leaders work with them, to inform what apprentices will learn about. However, a small number of employers would rightly value more involvement in training plans so that they can better enable support for apprentices to practise and develop their skills in the workplace.

Leaders now have better oversight and understanding of apprentices' experiences throughout their training. Leaders undertake frequent audits and hold monthly meetings with trainers. Leaders work with trainers to scrutinise apprentices' progress and work standards. They work jointly to resolve any areas of concern, such as use of the e-portfolio, and standards of assessment feedback. The full training team now meet every fortnight and attend quarterly development days.

Leaders monitor standards of teaching effectively. They visit training sessions and seek the views of apprentices. In the main, this informs well the subsequent quality improvement work leaders carry out.

Through the strengthened focus of quality improvement/assurance work, leaders now have a more accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses of training. However, they do not always recognise that some work set for apprentices is too easy, or that plans for apprentices to apply and practise their learning are not always well planned.

What progress have leaders and managers made in developing careers advice and guidance so that apprentices understand the whole range of opportunities available to them? **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders have developed the arrangements for the careers advice and guidance they give to apprentices effectively.

Before enrolment takes place, leaders take care to understand career progression opportunities for the apprentice within the employer's company.

Leaders now provide a personal development and careers course for all apprentices within their e-portfolio. Trainers follow the new teaching plan for this course and help apprentices to undertake work about career planning and mapping.

In progress reviews, trainers raise aspirations well and give helpful guidance about next steps. They talk to apprentices about what they want to do in the future and ask them about their awareness of the career opportunities available to them. Trainers give apprentices advice about what they need to do to achieve their goals. They promote well future development opportunities within apprentices' companies. Trainers link effectively with employers to find out about upcoming opportunities to inform these conversations. When apprentices express an aspiration to progress to another employer, or to embark on a career change, trainers seek additional support for them. Apprentices feel confident to approach their trainers for guidance and rightly value their professional and supportive approach.

Apprentices aged under 18, who study on early years courses, undertake additional appropriate activities. These activities help them learn about the wide-ranging career pathways available to them. For example, apprentices complete a 'Road to Success' career plan, and use sector-based career progression maps to research career pathways. As a result, apprentices have a sound understanding of their future career options.

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