

# Inspection of VQ Solutions Ltd

Inspection dates: 4–7 February 2020

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>
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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Information about this provider

VQ Solutions Ltd is an independent learning provider based in Harrogate which started to deliver apprenticeships in 2013. At the time of the inspection, 93 apprentices were on frameworks and standards-based programmes. Thirty-nine apprentices follow the information technology (IT) web and telecoms apprenticeship framework at level 3 and 30 apprentices follow the business administration standards-based programme at level 3. The remaining apprentices follow standards-based programmes in digital marketer at level 3, human resources support at level 3, infrastructure technician at level 3, network engineer at level 4, human resources consultant at level 5, and business management at level 5. VQ Solutions Ltd has training premises in Harrogate and provides apprenticeships for employers predominantly across Yorkshire and the East Midlands. The provider does not subcontract any provision to external organisations.

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

Apprentices receive good support from staff. Staff know their apprentices very well and use this knowledge to provide useful learning activities that enable apprentices to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Managers recruit apprentices carefully and enable them to settle well into their job roles and quickly develop their confidence and independence. Employers are impressed by apprentices' willingness to innovate and to take on increased responsibility early in their apprenticeship. For example, apprentices in business management, who previously would not have put themselves forward, now take the lead on 'time to talk day', which promotes talking about mental health in the workplace.

Apprentices demonstrate high levels of respect for staff, peers and colleagues at work, contributing well to a positive workplace culture. Apprentices enjoy the opportunities to work with their peers at workshops to share experiences from their different workplaces.

Apprentices feel safe at work and in the learning environment. Most apprentices have a sound understanding of fundamental British values, staying safe online, and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices, particularly those based in larger towns and cities, have a good understanding of local risks such as the dangers of, for example, knife crime and county lines.

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

Leaders have a clear purpose to deliver apprenticeships that meet specialist employer needs in the IT, telecoms and data cable industry, which are critical to national IT infrastructure. In addition, leaders meet the needs of local employers by providing administration, IT systems and digital marketing apprenticeships. Leaders carefully select employers to ensure that the apprentices whom they recruit benefit from high-quality training.

Managers plan and sequence the content of apprenticeship training meticulously. Consequently, the training meets the needs of employers and enables apprentices to gain significant new knowledge and use it to be effective in their job roles. For example, managers focus on safe working practices before moving on to develop telecom apprentices' knowledge of copper cables and how to terminate them.

Staff have developed very high-quality online learning resources, which apprentices use effectively to extend their knowledge. For telecoms apprentices, these are well presented and contain helpful information, with useful diagrams about topics such as cable installation standards, structured cabling, data centres, patch panels and different wiring systems for cable termination. Apprentices use this information to help them produce videos of themselves carrying out tasks correctly and explaining accurately how equipment such as fluke testers works.

Apprentices attend useful workshops at which staff provide learning activities that help apprentices recall their knowledge. IT systems apprentices develop their skills and knowledge about different ways of working with databases that would not be explored in on-the-job learning. Apprentices value the opportunity to work with IT systems apprentices from other employers; this expands their knowledge of the different job roles that IT apprentices undertake. For example, apprentices develop skills in alternative ways of working with databases, knowledge of different types of database controls, and manual processing operations.

Managers and employers provide apprentices with good-quality and well-coordinated on- and off-the-job training. Consequently, apprentices benefit from the opportunity to practise and improve the skills associated with the theoretical knowledge that they acquire by using the online resources and the workshops. For example, business administration apprentices develop good communication skills. They gain confidence in speaking on the telephone and talking to people face to face. Apprentices realise the importance of adapting their communication and body language when dealing with a range of clients and colleagues.

Staff provide very good advice and guidance to apprentices at the start of their programme. Managers match apprentices to job vacancies very carefully. Apprentices benefit from high-quality information and helpful advice to prepare them for their next steps. For example, business administration apprentices complete an analysis to identify how they have improved since starting in their roles and what knowledge and skills they need to improve further to help them gain promotion.

A high proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship gain promotion at work, or progress to higher-level apprenticeships or higher education.

Leaders have not addressed a weakness from the previous inspection quickly enough. A very small minority of telecoms engineers continue to develop their mathematics skills too slowly and do not see the importance of developing these skills for their job role.

Younger telecoms and IT systems apprentices are ambitious to develop a career in data installation. A very small minority of apprentices who have worked in the industry for longer do not value as highly the new knowledge that they acquire on their apprenticeship.

Apprentices have access to high-quality online resources as part of a well-developed personal development curriculum. However, assessors do not promote these resources well enough and too few apprentices use them. As a result, too many apprentices do not benefit from developing their knowledge about, for example, their physical and mental well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put in place useful policies and procedures to support apprentices in keeping safe and to raise their awareness of local risks and issues. Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) are appropriately experienced and qualified. They receive helpful information from local and regional support agencies to keep updated on current risks, including online safety, child sexual exploitation and county lines. Leaders ensure that staff are suitable to work with apprentices. They carry out relevant background checks including enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training and frequent updates from the DSLs.

### **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Continue to improve the support for apprentices who need to develop their mathematics knowledge and skills.
- Improve the initial and ongoing careers guidance for apprentices who have been in their job roles for a significant length of time prior to commencing their apprenticeship, to enable them to see the value of the knowledge that they gain.
- Promote the benefits of the online personal development curriculum to apprentices more effectively.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	58570
<b>Address</b>	Osbourne House, 20 Victoria Avenue Harrogate HG1 5QY
<b>Contact number</b>	01423 740006
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.vqsolutions.co.uk">www.vqsolutions.co.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Andrew Gilmour/Annabel Gilmour
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6–8 December 2017
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	N/A

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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 observing learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

### Inspection team

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