

PeoplePlus follow-up review

A follow-up report by Education Scotland about the quality of Modern Apprenticeships programmes provided by PeoplePlus

10 May 2019

In 2017, the Scottish Government asked Education Scotland to undertake a review of the quality of Modern Apprenticeship (MA) programmes delivered by Learndirect in a range of employment sectors in Scotland. In August 2018, all the Learndirect staff and the Skills Development Scotland (SDS) apprenticeship contracts were novated from Learndirect to PeoplePlus, which became responsible for the running of the SDS contract.

The Education Scotland [Learndirect MA report](#) was published on 16 March 2018 and delivered six recommendations. This follow-up report focusses on the progress being made on each of the recommendations contained within the original review report.

In early 2019, teams of reviewers from Education Scotland visited employers, covering a range of PeoplePlus apprenticeship programmes, to consider the progress being made in each of the recommendations from the March 2018 report.

The team of reviewers visited apprentices in employers in multiple locations. These include Tesco Bank, Lloyds Banking Group, Bank of Scotland, The University of Edinburgh, The Scottish Government, KPMG, Keane Support Services, Three Bridges Care Home, McColls, New Look and House of Bruar. The teams held discussions with senior managers at PeoplePlus, apprentices, coaches and employers.

This report indicates whether or not PeoplePlus has made, or has not made, satisfactory progress in achieving each of the recommendations. This is indicated at the start of each section.

The recommendations, with the judgments from Education Scotland on the progress that has been made on each recommendation, are outlined below.

1. Achievement rates for all apprentices improve and are at least commensurate with, or above, the national benchmark rate for each occupational sector.

Overall, PeoplePlus is not making satisfactory progress in improving achievement for all apprentices. Achievement for the apprenticeship programmes in providing financial services, food and drink operations, accounting, business and administration and retail sectors, show that these apprenticeships are progressing well and have higher levels of achievement than the national average for the same period. Achievement for the hospitality and customer service sectors is just below the national average.

However, achievement for apprenticeships in management programmes is low and below the national average. For the social services and healthcare programme, apprenticeship achievement is very low and significantly lower than the national average for the sector. These Healthcare apprentices have very slow rates of progression, and some have yet to start their programme activities, even though they commenced the programme eight months previously.

PeoplePlus managers support coaches well where the targets on apprentice achievement rates are not being met. For example, they carry out more regular Observational Teaching Learning Assessments to monitor the quality of delivery and its impact on improving achievement rates. There is also a clearer focus for all PeoplePlus coaches and managers on the progress of individual apprentices.

2. All apprentices have opportunities to discuss their training needs jointly with assessors and their employers or managers, to ensure their programme matches their job roles and they are making good progress.

For this recommendation, the team of reviewers considered the following areas:

- accessibility and flexibility of programmes;
- progress of apprentices in gaining relevant skills for their job role;
- apprentice achievement of essential skills, including core skills;
- preparation for employment and/or further learning; and
- value added to employers.

PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress in ensuring that apprentices discuss regularly their programme and progress with their managers and coaches. The coaches from PeoplePlus, working with managers from the employers, ensure the apprentices' programme is aligned well with the demands of their job role. At induction, most apprentices appreciate the comprehensive discussions on issues such as health and safety, safeguarding and time allocations for unit completion. There are also useful discussions at this stage with apprentices, managers and coaches on the types of optional units which apprentices could undertake, and which units relate well to their job role.

Almost all apprentices are gaining and developing appropriate skills for their job and improving their understanding of their role. They find the programme links well to the expectations of their employers and is relevant to the role they perform in the workplace. Most managers state that apprentices have developed skills which they use well in their job roles and most apprentices appreciate the challenges the programmes offer to help develop relevant skills. In many cases, apprentices are given duties and responsibilities which broaden their skills, deepen their understanding of their work and keep their motivation to succeed at a high level.

3. Communication with employers results in apprentices being placed on the appropriate level of training programme, which meets their needs and enables them to achieve at a suitable pace.

For this recommendation, the team of reviewers considered the following areas:

- planning of high quality delivery;
- relevance and range of programmes to apprentice and employer needs;
- links between training and employer and sector needs;
- quality of relationships between staff and apprentices and employers; and
- apprentice and employer feedback and satisfaction with programme.

PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation. For almost all employers and apprentices, communication with coaches is regular and supports both managers and apprentices well as they advance through the programme and make appropriate progress. Coaches have established very good relationships with both managers and apprentices.

Most apprentices are placed on the correct level of programme. These decisions are made in conjunction with the apprentices and their employers. However, in a few employers, apprentices have been placed on the wrong level of programme for their needs or abilities. For example, in one business administration programme, the employer had placed some apprentices on too low a programme level for their abilities and they were insufficiently challenged. For those apprentices placed on too high a programme level, as in the healthcare programme, they

suffered stress and anxiety as they struggled to complete their workload for the programme and their progress was slow.

Overall, feedback from apprentices and employers is used well by PeoplePlus coaches to plan for the next stages of learning in conjunction with the apprentices and their managers.

4. Core skills provision and assessment are more specific and are contextualised to the apprentices' job role.

For this recommendation, the team of reviewers considered the following areas:

- core skills activities and assessment meet the needs of all apprentices and employers;
- appropriate range of contextualised core skills activities linked to their job roles;
- relevance of the core skills to the programme and employers;
- design of programmes to reflect employer and apprentice needs; and
- motivation and engagement of apprentices.

PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation. At induction, coaches take new apprentices through core skills diagnostic scans to ascertain their requirements. Many of the apprentices have already gained the required core skills for their programme and, therefore, are not required to undertake these units. In most cases, coaches and managers try to ensure the core skills units are relevant to their sector. Coaches also try to make sure the evidence gathered for those apprentices undertaking core skills units is contextualised to their job role.

However, a few apprentices do not appreciate the value of their core skills activities within their programme, as the activities are not contextualised to their job role and they fail to see the relevance of undertaking them.

5. The turnover of assessors is reduced and that improved continuity of assessors results in stable relationships with apprentices.

For this recommendation, the team of reviewers considered the following areas:

- how stable the relationships are with assessors; and
- appropriate and regular engagement with apprentices and managers to discuss progress.

PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation. In most cases, the rate of turnover of coaches working with apprentices has been significantly reduced. This has helped to create more stable relationships with apprentices and employers. This stability over time is generating high levels of trust and confidence with apprentices and supports their ongoing progress on the programme. Employers welcome engaging with the same coach as it allows them to work and plan the programme together with the apprentices and provides for stronger continuity.

However, in the healthcare programme, there have been three coaches in place in the previous eight months and apprentices had very little contact with the coaches.

Overall, relationships between coaches, apprentices and managers are very strong. Meetings between PeoplePlus coaches, employers and apprentices are regular and effective. Coaches meet changing work patterns flexibly when required.

Coaches and managers discuss the programmes with the apprentices during induction procedures. This ensures that all parties are aware of the requirements of the programme and build in appropriate time and activities to ensure successful completion. For example, in many cases, PeoplePlus coaches use the Development Needs Analysis tool to identify the support needs of the apprentices, and to help coaches and apprentices reflect on the progress of the apprentice through the programme.

In almost all cases, managers, apprentices and coaches from PeoplePlus hold discussions at an early stage of the programme to provide opportunities to create bespoke work-related programme activities for the job role. These discussions also deliver opportunities to provide optional units in programmes which best suit the apprentices and the employers.

However, in those programmes where discussions between apprentices, employers and coaches did not take place, or were irregular, the apprentice's experience was greatly diminished.

6. Communication with subcontractors is more regular and systematic, and results in improvements to quality of delivery of the programme for apprentices.

PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation. PeoplePlus managers have consolidated and reduced significantly the number of sub-contractors with which it contracts for the delivery of apprenticeship programmes. Managers have acted swiftly to terminate agreements with subcontractors who were delivering poorly performing outsourced apprenticeship provision. The company has managed the subcontracted provision so that the number of subcontractors is extremely low, and those that are still contracted deliver a quality service.

Appendix 1: Table showing Education Scotland evaluations for each of the six recommendations

Recommendation	Evaluation
<p>1 Achievement rates for all apprentices improve and are at least commensurate with, or above, the national benchmark rate for each occupational sector.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is not making satisfactory progress in improving the achievement rates for all apprentices.</p>
<p>2 All apprentices have opportunities to discuss their training needs jointly with assessors and their employers or managers, to ensure their programme matches their job roles and they are making good progress.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation.</p>
<p>3 Communication with employers results in apprentices being placed on the appropriate level of training programme, which meets their needs and enables them to achieve at a suitable pace.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation.</p>
<p>4 Core skills provision and assessment are more specific and are contextualised to the apprentices' job role.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation.</p>
<p>5 The turnover of assessors is reduced and that improved continuity of assessors results in stable relationships with apprentices.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation.</p>
<p>6 Communication with subcontractors is more regular and systematic, and results in improvements to quality of delivery of the programme for apprentices.</p>	<p>PeoplePlus is making satisfactory progress on this recommendation.</p>

Education Scotland

Denholm House
Almondvale Business Park
Almondvale Way
Livingston EH54 6GA

T +44 (0)131 244 4330
E enquiries@education.scotland.gsi.gov.uk

<https://education.gov.scot/>

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