



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**PeoplePlus Cymru
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by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

About PeoplePlus Cymru

PeoplePlus Group Limited is a national independent training provider owned by Staffline Group PLC. PeoplePlus Cymru delivers training programmes in north, mid and south Wales. Since August/September 2019, PeoplePlus Cymru has taken learners from the closure of a long-established main contract holder for work-based learning and employed additional staff to support these learners. The provider has approximately 1250 learners on training programmes. The provider employs 61 full and part-time staff. The current Welsh Government contract value is approximately £6.2m.

The provider and its subcontractors deliver higher apprenticeship, apprenticeship, foundation apprenticeship and traineeship engagement and level 1 programmes.

The provider works with the following subcontractors:

- JP Training
- Inspire
- Rossett Training
- Centre for Work Based Learning
- Bethany Training
- ISA
- Business Sense
- WBTA
- Plato Training
- Kwikfit
- Track Training

The provider and the subcontractors deliver a variety of training programmes in:

- Early Years Care and Education
- Health and Social Care
- Business Administration
- Construction
- Engineering
- Hospitality
- Management and Professional
- Manufacturing
- Hair and Beauty
- Retail, Customer Services and Warehousing

Summary

Most learners make appropriate progress in developing vocational and life skills on the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes. Many learners have a wide range of suitable practical skills that benefit them in their job role or prepare them well for the world of work. However, there has been a significant decline in the number of higher apprentices that complete their training programme on time.

Most learners are motivated and keen to learn. They are enthusiastic and highly value the support from the tutors and assessors. Many traineeship learners attend off-the-job training sessions regularly and apprenticeship learners are committed to their employer in the workplace.

Nearly all tutors and assessors plan their training sessions and assessment activities well. However, in many cases, the tutor or assessor does not allow the learner to take ownership of their tasks and their questioning techniques do not challenge learners sufficiently.

Nearly all staff know their learners well and understand their support needs and barriers to learning. The advice and guidance that tutors give to learners helps many traineeship learners to identify activities that match their interests and helps them to develop longer term goals. However, during reviews, many assessors miss opportunities to ensure that all learners extend their awareness and understanding of safeguarding and radicalisation systematically.

The provider's small senior leadership team has a clear focus on Welsh Government priorities. The provider takes appropriate account of employer needs within each area of Wales and has developed a clear corporate vision that is supported by key strategic objectives to meet its business aims. However, self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes are under developed and lack rigour, particularly in important areas such as monitoring of safeguarding within the sub-contracted provision. The provider places too high a focus on learner outcome data and not enough on developing effective communication with subcontractors to monitor their performance, identify key areas for improvement or share good practice.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Adequate and needs improvement
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Adequate and needs improvement
Care, support and guidance	Adequate and needs improvement
Leadership and management	Adequate and needs improvement

Recommendations

- R1 Improve learners' literacy and numeracy skills
- R2 Improve learners' use of Welsh as a workplace skill
- R3 Improve the clarity and focus of targets that tutors and assessors agree with learners
- R4 Improve the extent to which tutors and assessors challenge learners to reach their full potential
- R5 Evaluate the impact of Prevent training on learners' understanding of radicalisation and extremism
- R6 Strengthen self-evaluation processes and procedures and the rigour of self-evaluation
- R7 Strengthen the quality assurance of subcontracted delivery including the monitoring of safeguarding

What happens next

Placing a provider in Estyn review

The provider will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the provider's progress.

Main findings

Standards: Adequate and needs improvement

Most learners demonstrate sound practical workplace skills. Most apprentices perform their job roles well. In their written work for assessments, they identify appropriately how theory and legislation relate to their job roles. For example, in health care settings, apprentices know the relevant legislation and how it applies to their settings, and the patients and residents in their care. An apprentice in a play centre describes clearly how she maintains a safe environment for children to play, keeps records of risk assessments and what actions she takes if children have accidents. However, in their reviews and in their written work, only a few apprenticeship learners reflect deeply on their work, apply thinking or problem solving skills to new situations or stretch their understanding beyond that required by the framework.

Most traineeship learners develop their understanding of the rights and responsibilities of being an employee and how they can contribute effectively in a work place.

Many learners make appropriate progress on their training programmes. A few make strong progress and finish earlier than expected. However, around half of higher apprentices take longer to complete their apprenticeship than expected.

Nearly all learners on traineeship programmes complete initial assessments of their literacy and numeracy skills and make sound progress in developing their literacy and digital skills. Most listen and contribute well in their training sessions and produce written work of a suitable standard. However, they do not practise or develop numeracy skills enough.

Many learners on apprenticeship programmes are often unaware of the outcomes of their initial skills assessments and do not have clear targets for development of their literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills. As a result, they do not make the progress of which they are capable. A very few apprentices attain essential skills qualifications at a level higher than that required by their framework.

Over the last three years, there has been an increase in the proportion of learners undertaking some aspect of their qualification bilingually, although these increases have been largely confined to one sub-contractor for apprentices and a few centres for traineeships. A very few learners actively use or develop their Welsh language skills as part of their work, through for example, speaking and learning Welsh with residents at a care home, or singing Welsh songs with children in a day nursery. However, across the provider as a whole only a few learners develop their Welsh language as a workplace skill or appreciate the potential benefits of doing so.

The overall rates at which learners achieve their apprenticeship frameworks have been above the national average in the last three years. In the period 2015 - 2017 the rates at which learners achieved their foundation apprenticeships was slightly below the national average. In 2017-2018 the rate for foundation apprenticeships has improved and is at the national average. Over the last three years, nearly all apprenticeship programmes have performed at rates above the national average. In

the same period success rates in higher apprenticeship programmes have been consistently above the national average. However, achievement rates for learners participating in hospitality and retail learning programmes are below the national average. Learning activity and progression rates across other programmes, including engagement, traineeship and traineeship level 1 have been around the national average over the last three years.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Most learners demonstrate a positive attitude towards their learning and engage well during on and off-the-job activities. They maintain productive working relationships with their assessors and tutors that foster learning. They interact effectively with them and respond confidently to their questions. Many are self-motivated, enthusiastic and keen to progress to the next level of training.

Most traineeship learners attend training sessions regularly and gain valuable experience at their work placements. They develop self-confidence during their training programme and on work placement. This helps many learners to progress successfully to further education, training or employment.

In off-the-job training sessions, learners work well with their peers and tutors. For example, traineeship learners demonstrate strong team working when preparing a meal together and working in small groups. In the workplace, apprenticeship learners become valued members of their employers' staff as they develop their knowledge and skills. They balance the needs of their employers and the demands of their training programmes successfully.

In learner progress review meetings, most apprenticeship learners focus effectively on their work, and many play an active role in discussions with their assessors. A minority reflect carefully on their roles and explain the day-to-day challenges they face and how they overcome these. However, a few learners rely too much on their assessors to manage and organise their work. In a few instances, apprenticeship learners sit passively waiting for extended periods during review meetings while their assessors complete documentation.

Nearly all learners feel safe in training centres and their workplace, and most are aware of the wellbeing support available to them. Nearly all learners have a basic understanding about to whom they can talk if they have concerns about safeguarding or radicalisation.

Traineeship learners develop an appreciation of equality and diversity with many confident to give robust challenge to the views of others. This helps to develop and share essential values with their peers. However, a few traineeship learners express biased views based on gender stereotypes.

Many traineeship learners take part in charitable and community-based activities, such as volunteering at food banks, clearing nearby beaches, assisting in decorating and renovating local schools and raising money for charities through sponsored walks. These activities help develop learners' appreciation of their communities and environment and recognise how they can support them.

Overall, many learners feel that the provider helps them understand how to live healthy lives. Most traineeship learners have a sound understanding of how to make healthy diet and lifestyle choices. They undertake a range of worthwhile activities as part of their training programmes, for example on healthy eating and the dangers of substance misuse.

Traineeship learners with barriers to learning access additional support through the provider's dedicated counsellor. Traineeship learners who engage with such support are able to overcome these barriers and most successfully complete their training programme.

Teaching and learning experiences: Adequate and needs improvement

Most tutors and assessors develop productive working relationships with their learners which supports learning. They are knowledgeable, experienced and know their learning areas well. Nearly all assessors are flexible in their approach to meet employer and learner needs. Most provide effective levels of support for learners to achieve their qualification frameworks. Nearly all assessors have well established effective relationships with employers and use these well to support learners' progress.

Many assessors plan on-the-job assessment activities well and use their detailed knowledge of learners' work patterns to suggest purposeful evidence to meet the qualification outcomes. As a result, most learners understand what is expected of them and how they will be assessed. However, many assessors miss opportunities to challenge learners to take ownership of their own learning. This means that many learners rely too heavily on input and direction from their assessors, especially on apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship programmes.

Most tutors and assessors use an appropriate range of approaches, resources and practical activities to engage and motivate learners. Many ask a suitable mix of open and closed questions. However a majority do not use questioning techniques effectively enough to extend learners' knowledge and skills or to probe and deepen their understanding. For example, many tutors and assessors give learners answers to questions too quickly rather than allowing time or space for learners to think and answer for themselves. As a result, in many sessions learners are not challenged sufficiently to reach their full potential.

Most assessors undertake learner progress reviews that are too compliance based and do not focus sufficiently on agreeing personalised and challenging targets that drive learning and deepen learners' understanding of connections between theory and practice. Most assessors mark learners' work regularly and provide constructive feedback which informs learners what they need to improve.

Most individual learning plans and progress reviews on apprenticeship programmes are focused too narrowly on generic unit completion targets and do not sufficiently address and support the development of wider skills or specify appropriate personalised short-term milestones. As a result, too many learners take longer than scheduled to complete their training frameworks.

Many tutors and assessors use a recently introduced online portfolio system systematically to track the progress of learners. However, in a minority of sessions, assessors do not encourage learners to take enough responsibility for uploading their own evidence or evaluating their own progress.

The provider delivers an appropriate range of programmes that are well matched to the needs of learners and employers.

Many staff support learners well to help those overcome challenges and barriers to learning, which enables them to succeed in achieving their qualification goals. For example, they support learners with additional learning needs and those with English as an additional language appropriately.

The provider is beginning to make encouraging progress in increasing the quantity of learning carried out bilingually. However, across the provider too little provision is carried out bilingually. Tutors and assessors do not promote the value and use of the Welsh language consistently or effectively enough and do not promote the language as an employment skill.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate and needs improvement

Nearly all staff undertake detailed initial assessments with learners. They identify learners' specific support needs clearly, such as travel arrangements, English language development and support for mental health. A team of business development advisors work effectively with traineeship learners to develop individualised learning programmes which allow learners to progress to work placements and to complete their programmes successfully. Most learners have access to specialist support, such as counselling. Without this support there are many examples of learners who would have left their programmes early.

Assessors for the apprenticeship learners use tracking and monitoring systems well to record and monitor learners' progress against qualification requirements. The provider's system for tracking and monitoring of traineeship learners' progress and support needs is less robust. Nearly all staff have a clear and detailed understanding of the support needs of their learners. They use this knowledge well to ensure that they provide tailored, sensitive support that helps learners to continue working towards their learning goals. The helpful advice and guidance that tutors give to learners helps many traineeship learners to identify activities that match their interests and helps them to develop longer term goals. It also enables many apprenticeship learners to identify options within their framework that best meet their vocational roles.

The provider's staff hold regular focus groups with traineeship learners to gather their views and it uses this information effectively to extend the range of opportunities it provides. For example, learners expressed an interest in working outside the centre more, so the provider has strengthened the opportunities for them to work on community projects such as food banks or school renovation projects.

Most tutors challenge robustly learners' stereotypical views and encourage them to respect equality and diversity in training and in the workplace. However, a minority of staff miss opportunities to discuss this issue routinely during apprenticeship reviews.

Most learners gain additional qualifications or skills that further improve their employability, such as First Aid, food hygiene certificates or Construction Skills Certification Scheme cards.

Nearly all tutors and assessors have undertaken helpful training on safeguarding and preventing radicalisation and nearly all are clear who they need to report to if they have any concerns. However, a few staff are unable to recall the detail of this training.

The provider has appropriate policies and procedures regarding safeguarding and Prevent. However, the provider's arrangements cause concern because it does not have clear procedures to ensure it monitors safeguarding and Prevent-related matters within its subcontractors with sufficient rigour and frequency.

Leadership and management: Adequate and needs improvement

The provider's managers and leaders have responded well to regional and national priorities for training in Wales and have a clear focus on the Welsh Government national priorities for training, including the principles of the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The provider has developed a clear corporate vision that is supported by key strategic objectives to meet its business aims. As a result, there is a recently strengthened focus on setting clear expectations for staff at all levels.

The provider's self-evaluation processes make sound use of high level learner performance data to identify trends. Sub-contractors play a useful role in self-evaluation by attending an annual self-assessment development day. However, the provider's overarching self-evaluation is too focused on learner outcome data and does not fully reflect the full range of activities undertaken by learners, tutors and assessors. It is not sufficiently evaluative and does not state areas for improvement clearly enough. Four of the six recommendations from the last Estyn inspection report have not been fully addressed and are still current areas for improvement.

The provider has long-established and new partnership arrangements with a range of sub-contractors. However, the management of sub-contractors is not robust enough. Monitoring of procedures and practices are compliance based. As a result, the provider does not have a clear understanding of the quality of a wide range of training activities undertaken by its sub-contractors and their learners. The provider is too reliant on its sub-contractors supplying information. The provider does not use a comprehensive range of quality probes and performance indicators to secure first hand evidence regarding essential aspects of the sub-contractors' work, such as the quality of teaching, training and assessment.

Communication between the provider and its sub-contractors is underdeveloped with a lack of regular, formal, scheduled meetings involving all partners. This means that key information such as the sharing of learner performance data, the identification and sharing of best practice and the key areas for improvement are not shared openly across all sub-contractors.

Senior leaders have appropriate plans to secure the long term sustainability of the business during periods of contract transition by diversifying their business into new markets. Leaders and managers regularly update staff with information on contractual developments. Spending decisions, contract management and financial planning of senior leader's link appropriately to strategic priorities.

The provider has a company-wide corporate professional development strategy which focuses strongly on leadership development across the business and offers a range of professional learning opportunities for its own staff. However, the provider has not clearly identified its key priorities for the professional development of its delivery staff in Wales.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and employer questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, trainers and assessors and the governing body where appropriate through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle managers and individual teachers, trainers and assessors to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions, including on and off-the-job sessions where appropriate
- observe and speak to learners at lunch and break times
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- consider the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment and progress, records of meetings of staff and the governing body (where appropriate), information on learners' wellbeing, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional development

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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