

ProCo NW Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

6–9 March 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement	Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Requires improvement	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- A low number of learners on study programmes complete their qualifications as too many leave their programme early.
- Assessors and tutors focus too narrowly on qualification aims and the related learning tasks, resulting in too many apprentices and learners not achieving their full potential.
- Assessors and tutors do not routinely consider apprentices' and learners' starting points when setting learning targets. Consequently, apprentices and learners cannot monitor their progress accurately and seek help when they fall behind.
- Apprentices and learners do not have a good enough understanding of the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation.
- Apprentices and learners do not improve their use of English and mathematics as the quality of the teaching and assessment of these subjects is weak.
- Leaders and managers have not rectified the recommendations for improvement made at the previous inspection and so the quality of the provision has not improved.
- Leaders and managers do not evaluate accurately the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment. Consequently, their improvement plans are not effective in raising standards.

The provider has the following strengths

- Managers successfully recruit onto study programmes learners who have not been in education or training, or have gained little from their schools.
- Learners on study programmes, especially on animal care and sport courses, benefit from good vocational training and high-quality work experience that help them to develop valuable job-related skills.
- Apprentices and learners are respectful and most have a good understanding of British values.
- Most apprentices and learners on study programmes who stay on their courses achieve their qualifications and progress to higher-level courses or apprenticeships or find jobs.
- The board of trustees and the chief executive officer are ambitious for the future and improving the quality of the provision for apprentices and learners, having successfully improved the organisation's finances.

Full report

Information about the provider

- ProCo NW Limited (ProCo) is an independent not-for-profit learning provider that operates from Wigan, Greater Manchester. It has four training centres, three in Wigan and one in Wycombe where the company offers sport provision in partnership with Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. It recruits apprentices and learners from a wide geographical area, including Merseyside and Greater Manchester. The chief executive officer (CEO) has the overall responsibility for the company and is supported by 10 managers and around 60 other staff, including assessors and tutors.
- The company offers study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 up to level 2 and apprenticeships at intermediate and advanced levels in health and social care, animal care, building and construction, motor vehicle and sport. At the time of the inspection, ProCo subcontracted around 35% of its training provision to seven subcontractors.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Reduce the number of learners on 16 to 19 study programmes who do not complete their courses by ensuring that all learners receive detailed guidance so they have an accurate understanding of their options and are enrolled on the right course and receive the support required to help them complete their studies.
- Ensure that assessors and tutors develop apprentices' and learners' vocational and broader skills so they all achieve their potential, by:
 - using apprentices' and learners' starting points to set them clear, specific and demanding targets
 - setting appropriately challenging learning tasks
 - monitoring and recording accurately apprentices' and learners' progress against their targets so that they make good progress.
- Evaluate accurately the quality of teaching, training, assessment and reviews so that good practice can be identified and shared and that staff development activities are appropriate to improve the quality in underperforming subjects.
- Develop and implement an effective policy to improve apprentices' and learners' English and mathematical skills, so that they can apply these skills to their vocational courses and in the workplace.
- Ensure that assessors and tutors are skilled in reinforcing to apprentices and learners the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, so that they are more aware of how to protect themselves.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The board of trustees and the CEO have a clear vision for the future of the company. Having responded effectively to significant financial and staffing issues during the past two years, they are determined to ensure a rapid pace of improvements and have sufficient capacity to do so. The CEO and managers have taken several positive actions to improve apprentices' and learners' experience, such as expanding the work experience for learners on study programmes. However, they have not tackled a significant number of recommendations made at the previous inspection and consequently the quality of the provision has not improved.
- Since the previous inspection, the CEO and managers have reduced the proportion of apprentices and learners who receive all or part of their training in subcontractors from around half of all learners to currently one third. Leaders stopped using a poor-performing subcontractor. However, they did not act fast enough and a significant number of learners in the subcontractor did not complete their courses. The monitoring of the quality of the provision of current subcontractors is not sufficiently robust. Many of the records from the meetings with subcontractors are incomplete. Consequently, managers cannot systematically review the improvements agreed with subcontractors.
- Managers do not have an accurate view of the quality of teaching, training and assessment that apprentices and learners receive. They do not identify good practice in teaching and learning. They have not developed effective arrangements to evaluate assessors' and tutors' practices. Managers do not have high expectations of the quality of learning that assessors and tutors deliver. Managers' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is too optimistic. When they identify issues, they do not implement robust action plans to ensure swift improvements. For example, although managers have identified the weaknesses in the quality of apprentices' and learners' progress reviews, they have not ensured that the issues are rectified.
- Since the previous inspection, the CEO and managers have dealt effectively with the weak performance of several staff and these have now left the company. Performance management is still not sufficiently rigorous in holding all staff to account for the achievement of their learners and apprentices. Assessors and tutors have attended a wide range of training sessions, for example on how to use apprentices' and learners' starting points to plan lessons and on effective ways to check learners' knowledge and understanding. However, not all the assessors' and tutors' practices have improved. Managers do not have an accurate enough understanding of the impact of staff development on improving quality. Leaders' and managers' self-assessment of the provision is overoptimistic.
- Despite recent improvements in the number of apprentices and learners who have passed their functional skills tests, the provision in English and mathematics is not good. Managers have not developed and implemented a clear policy for improving apprentices' and learners' skills in these subjects. The provision for apprentices and learners who require to achieve A* to C grades in GCSE English and mathematics requires improvement.

- In response to the recommendation from the previous inspection, managers have revised and implemented a new management information system. They now have good access to accurate and reliable data about many aspects of apprentices' and learners' performance, including attendance data for each centre. In the sports courses, managers have developed good systems to monitor their learners' progress and take action to keep them on track to achieve. Plans are in place to replicate similar systems for all courses. The improvements in the availability of data have not yet had sufficient impact on using the analysis of it to bring about focused improvements.
- Leaders review routinely the provision and make changes to ensure that it meets the needs of apprentices, learners and employers. For example, they no longer offer hairdressing and beauty therapy courses as there is sufficient provision in Wigan. The CEO, members of the board of trustees and managers have established very effective partnerships that benefit learners. These partnerships are a key element in the organisation, providing learners on study programmes with an insight into different local employment opportunities through a good range of industrial visits.
- Managers are particularly successful in providing courses that the young learners who have left education and training and are not in employment, find interesting. They have implemented successfully the principles of study programmes that prepare learners for their next steps. Leaders and managers collaborate well with the local enterprise partnership in Greater Manchester and many local employers to develop courses in response to employers' skills requirements.
- Staff promote well an ethos of respect for all. Managers and staff are successful in helping learners to develop a good awareness of different faiths and cultures. They have provided a good range of resources that many tutors and assessors use to prepare apprentices and learners well for life in modern Britain, for example through quizzes about elections. Managers have successfully reduced the achievement gaps between different groups of learners.

The governance of the provider

- Members of the board of trustees are ambitious to develop and improve the quality of the provision. The chair of the board and the board member with the responsibility for the oversight of the quality of the provision have a strong record of supporting the CEO to tackle organisational issues.
- The board members, alongside the CEO, have successfully stabilised the company finances. They have an in-depth understanding of the challenges that the organisation has encountered and resolved and are aware of the further improvements that are required. Members of the board are determined to support the CEO to make changes so that ProCo can make a more positive impact on the future prospects of apprentices and learners.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff at all levels in all training centres have a good understanding of how to keep apprentices and learners safe, and help them to be vigilant in respect of their own safety.

For example, learners know how to work safely online.

- Managers carry out appropriate checks on staff before recruitment and keep detailed records. The manager responsible for safeguarding maintains sufficiently detailed records of safeguarding concerns and actions taken, for example, when referrals to external agencies have been made.
- Staff have completed appropriate training on protecting apprentices and learners from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. However, managers have not ensured that assessors and tutors are skilful enough to extend further apprentices' and learners' understanding of what can cause radicalisation and the risks of taking extremist actions.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The learning and progress of apprentices and learners is restricted by teaching, training and assessment practices that are neither ambitious nor challenging. Assessors and tutors provide good personal support for apprentices and learners, but they do not set them expectations for high performance. Consequently, apprentices and learners do not fulfil their potential.
- Most assessors and tutors do not set apprentices and learners detailed, demanding and attainable learning and developmental targets. They do not use learners' starting points well to gain a clear understanding of how to plan their teaching and training to ensure that apprentices and learners develop their knowledge and understanding to a high standard. However, most lessons on animal care and sport courses are planned well. As a result, the majority of apprentices and learners in these programmes make good progress.
- Apprentices' and learners' training, delivered fully or partially by subcontractors, is not good enough. Too often, assessors do not ensure that apprentices understand how their off-the-job training helps them to carry out their job roles better or how the knowledge and skills they have developed in these sessions link to practical tasks in the workplace.
- In the less effective training sessions and lessons, assessors and tutors do not plan activities well to ensure that apprentices and learners develop their understanding at a good pace. Too often, they do not check apprentices' and learners' understanding well enough. Consequently, too many apprentices and learners do not progress well and a small minority lose interest, for example when tutors allow a few learners to dominate lessons.
- In the more effective lessons and off-the-job training sessions, such as in a minority of veterinary nursing and sport lessons, tutors check learning regularly. They ensure that apprentices and learners can apply their knowledge to real situations, for example in relating sports coaching theory to practical settings in schools.
- Assessors' and tutors' feedback on apprentices' and learners' work does not help them know what they need to do to improve. Too often, apprentices and learners make repeated mistakes. A minority of assessors and tutors provide effective and clear feedback, for example through highlighting subject-specific misunderstandings, for example administration apprentices' misunderstandings about aspects of office practices.

- Progress reviews do not identify accurately what apprentices and learners have learned and what they need to do next. They do not provide a robust assessment of apprentices' and learners' development of their employability and vocational skills. The reviews focus too narrowly on the work that apprentices and learners should complete to gain qualifications. Consequently, apprentices and learners, especially the most able, do not have a clear understanding of how far they have come and cannot identify clearly the work needed to develop further to achieve their potential.
- Despite the recent appointments of a new student support manager and additional learning support workers, those learners who require specific learning support do not receive this quickly enough. Consequently, these learners do not make sufficient progress. Although assessors and tutors have received relevant training, they are not yet skilled sufficiently to help apprentices and learners to improve their skills in English and mathematics.
- Apprentices receive good information before they start that helps them to understand the demands of their programmes. However, staff do not ensure that the information that learners on study programmes receive enables them to make the right choices, hence too many leave before completing. Learners receive a wide range of advice and guidance to help them plan their next steps, including the benefits of an apprenticeship after completing their courses. To help learners be better prepared for their next steps, staff arrange a wide range of activities, including visits to different companies and universities.
- In most lessons, assessors and tutors help apprentices and learners to broaden their understanding of fair treatment and how to value individuals' differences, for example by learners taking part in well-planned activities such as wheelchair football, which helps them to gain a better understanding of the needs of wheelchair users.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Attendance is too low in many lessons and is particularly poor for English and mathematics lessons. Many learners do not attend their lessons on time; consequently, they do not improve their prospects for employment and further progression to other courses.
- Learners do not develop good skills in using English and mathematics to support them well in the workplace. Standards of work in English GCSE at the Wigan Warriors site require improvement.
- In construction and motor vehicle study programmes, not all learners receive effective advice and guidance to ensure that they are on the right course and at the right level. Consequently, learners' attendance on these courses is low and too many leave before completing.
- Few apprentices and learners understand the impact of holding radical views or taking part in extremist activities. Assessors and tutors do not make these risks relevant to apprentices' and learners' everyday experiences.
- Learners behave well, both at work and in and out of lessons. They are respectful and tolerant of the views of their peers, tutors and visitors and demonstrate a clear understanding of British values.

- Learners know how to keep themselves safe online and report any concerns. They have a good understanding of risks associated with social media. Learners on sport courses recently engaged in discussions about keeping themselves safe linked to the current issues relating to safeguarding in football.
- Study programme learners who remain on their courses are clear about their future options. Learners have a weekly 'Let's get that job' lesson, which includes guest speakers focusing on future career and progression opportunities. For example, learners on animal management courses who are planning to start university understand the grades they need to achieve to gain a place.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- Outcomes for apprentices and learners have not improved since the previous inspection. For the last two years, the proportion of apprentices who completed their programme was around national rates.
- In 2015/16, comparing to 2014/15, more apprentices completed on time, although further improvements are required. Very few learners who retook GCSE examinations in English and mathematics achieved a grade C or above.
- A high proportion of learners on study programmes have low levels of prior attainment and have experienced interruptions in their education and training. In 2015/16, too few learners were successful on study programmes.
- So far in the current year, more apprentices and learners have achieved their functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics than in previous years. However, the proportion who are successful in gaining functional skills in these subjects requires further improvement. Too many current apprentices and learners make slow progress towards completing their qualifications. The standard of apprentices' and learners' work meets the necessary requirements to achieve but the standard of written work is often weak. Many assessors and tutors do not have high expectations of what their learners and apprentices are capable of achieving as many of them have a poor track record and a low starting point.
- Learners on study programmes enjoy their practical sessions and are proud of the good vocational skills they develop. For example, learners in wood occupations produce various types of joint, identifying confidently the appropriate use of each joint. Learners on plumbing courses use competently a range of pipe materials, including plastic, copper and low-carbon steel, in their tasks.
- A good proportion of learners on study programmes who complete their courses move to further study, employment or training. Most apprentices secure full-time employment or take on additional responsibilities in their workplace.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Study programmes constitute around half of ProCo's provision. At the time of the inspection, 275 learners aged 16 to 19 had enrolled in a wide range of courses up to level 3. Most learners study on either a preparation for life and work programme or a level 1 sports course.
- Managers and tutors are determined to improve the proportion of learners who attend regularly, for example they quickly follow up learners who do not attend lessons. However, they have not been successful in improving learners' attendance in all centres, to high levels. Consequently, learners who do not attend regularly make slower progress than their peers.
- Too many learners do not make the progress they are capable of because tutors do not plan lessons well to ensure that learners work at demanding levels. In most lessons, learners work on the same tasks and tutors do not check well enough the level of understanding, the pace of completion and the progress of each learner. Consequently, a significant number of learners are not challenged and do not achieve their potential
- Tutors do not challenge effectively learners to extend their learning beyond the minimum required by their qualifications. Too often, they focus too narrowly on learners completing elements of their courses without ensuring that they can link theory to practice and skills that they have developed. Learners do not extend their depth of understanding well enough because tutors do not sufficiently take into account learners' starting points and the knowledge that learners have gained in previous lessons.
- Tutors do not ensure that learners can apply and develop their skills in English and mathematics in practical lessons. Not all tutors encourage learners to keep their work tidy and well organised; consequently, learners cannot review their work and gain a clear understanding of what they have done. Learners' standards of work in GCSE English and mathematics are often of a poor quality.
- Tutors do not set sufficiently clear and demanding targets for learners so that they know what they need to improve. For example, learners' targets for regular attendance are only around 80%, giving them an inaccurate understanding of the standard expected in the workplace.
- Tutors' assessment practices on the majority of study programmes are effective and reliable. In practical lessons, tutors offer learners clear and useful feedback about improving their work. As a result, learners develop good practical skills, for example in motor vehicle courses.
- Learners benefit significantly from effective and well-planned work experience. Almost all learners participate in relevant external work experience that improves their employment-related skills. For a notable number of learners this leads to an apprenticeship with the employer. Learners benefit from working in a wide range of businesses, improving their confidence and communication. Several learners complete work experience in different countries as part of the 'everything is possible' initiative. For example, learners have had work experience in Malta that has influenced their career and university degree choice.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- At the time of the inspection, of 271 apprentices, 65% were intermediate and 35% were on advanced programmes. ProCo offers apprenticeships in a range of vocational subjects, including health and social care, animal care, engineering, construction and business administration. The highest number of apprentices are on animal care programmes, with a similar number completing engineering apprenticeships.
- Assessors do not plan apprentices' on- and off-the-job learning well enough. Consequently, too many apprentices do not relate theories to vocational practices and do not gain an in-depth knowledge of professional practices.
- Assessors do not use the information about apprentices' starting points well to plan their learning and assessment. In most instances, apprentices' learning targets are to complete a specific unit of their qualification without sufficient detail of what this entails or how they can achieve this goal. They do little to extend apprentices' knowledge beyond what is required by their qualifications. Assessors' reviewing and recording of apprentices' progress requires improvement. Consequently, many apprentices do not produce a high standard of work.
- Apprentices do not improve their English and mathematical skills well enough because assessors do not give enough importance to the development of these skills. Assessors do not sufficiently encourage apprentices to produce high-quality written work, particularly on engineering and construction programmes. As a result, apprentices continue to struggle with spelling and grammar.
- A significant minority of apprentices on engineering and construction programmes make slow progress, and as a result they do not achieve within the planned time. While managers have introduced a number of recent changes, such as more detailed monitoring of apprentices' progress, the progress of engineering and construction apprentices has not improved.
- Most assessors do not provide apprentices with sufficiently detailed feedback on their written work. Consequently, apprentices do not produce the standard of work of which that they are capable. However, assessors provide veterinary nursing apprentices with constructive feedback on how to improve their work and as a result, the majority of these apprentices produce written work of a particularly high standard.
- Theory lessons for apprentices on animal care programmes are good. Well-qualified and experienced assessors skilfully plan lessons using a wide range of resources and activities that maintain apprentices' interest. In veterinary nursing lessons, apprentices work well in small groups to identify common signs of feline infectious diseases. Effective peer support enables apprentices to share their specialist expertise developed in the workplace. As a result, apprentices make good progress and develop good, vocationally relevant skills. However, in a many other vocational areas, tutors move on to the next activity after introducing new concepts, without checking that all apprentices have fully understood.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53981
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18 and 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	700
CEO	Carol Halford
Telephone number	01942 318099
Website	www.proconw.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	131	–	55	–	89	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	136	40	82	12	–	–		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	5		–		5			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	N/A							
Funding received from:	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prestige Training Limited ■ Wigan Athletic FC Community Trust ■ Wigan and Leigh College ■ Burnley College ■ Blackburn College ■ St Helens College ■ CSL Limited 							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief executive officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

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