

Inspection dates

13–16 October 2015

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Adult learning programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Managers design, implement, evaluate and adapt the range of provision very effectively and provide coherent progression routes into employment, which meet local, regional and national priorities.
- Members of the board, managers and leaders set and achieve challenging targets for improving the quality of provision, through rigorous quality improvement activities and focus carefully on their impact on improving learners' experiences of learning and gaining successful outcomes.
- Teaching staff ensure that the learning environment is safe, friendly and supportive for learners and apprentices, including those who are at risk or vulnerable.
- Learners and apprentices are motivated by skilful teaching staff and gain valuable personal and vocational skills ensuring they improve their abilities, confidence and self-esteem, which allows them to make good progress.
- Teaching staff pay close attention to ensuring that learners develop English and mathematics skills, leading to almost all adult learners completing their courses and achieving their intended qualifications.
- A large majority of learners and apprentices continue in employment, start their own business, gain employment or continue with further training at a higher level.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Too few apprentices complete their qualifications within the expected and planned timescales.
- Apprentices' reviews do not routinely involve employers, to ensure they are fully informed of the progress that apprentices are making or of the targets that have been agreed.
- Apprentices do not always receive sufficient recorded feedback on their performance and progress following assessments and progress reviews.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ixion Holdings (Contracts) Limited (Ixion) is a large national independent learning provider which is part of Anglia Ruskin University, with head offices in Chelmsford and 15 centres around the country. Ixion also provides adult learning programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships in locations nationally to suit the client base and the agencies they work alongside.
- Around 8,000 learners and/or apprentices are enrolled on programmes each year. Approximately 900 current enrolments are apprentices, with the remainder mainly adult learners on part-time courses delivered in geographical regions to support pathways into employment and the development of enterprise skills with a view to self-employment.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of apprentices who complete their qualifications within their planned timescales by detailed monitoring of the progress apprentices are making, and implementing effective interventions to aid completion.
- Improve the involvement of employers in the target setting and the reviewing of the progress apprentices are making and, as a result, hasten their progress towards completion of units of their qualification.
- Teaching staff should follow up the good oral feedback they provide with detailed recorded feedback that apprentices can refer back to as they work to improve their performance.
- Raise awareness through, for example, open discussions with apprentices and learners so they are more aware of the threat of extremism and radicalisation.
- Leaders, managers and teaching staff should introduce strategies to challenge the more-able adult learners to make more rapid progress and reach their potential.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Leaders, managers and members of the board focus very clearly on learners and apprentices and their intended outcomes. Actions to increase opportunities for learners and apprentices regarding further training, employment chances, and to improve the quality of provision, are well developed and utilised across the provision. This results in good progress for most learners and current apprentices.
- The strategic and operational arrangements to ensure the provision is designed, implemented, evaluated and adapted are outstanding. Senior leaders ensure that social, environmental and community developments, which meet the needs of learners, employers, and local enterprise boards, are considered in the range of provision. For example, they work well with a construction company to employ apprentices, who were previously unemployed, to build social housing that is carefully designed to save energy.
- Strong and effective performance management has improved learners' experience and outcomes significantly. Teaching staff meet frequently with their managers, who monitor and review the progress of their learners and agree effective actions if learners fall behind. Managers help teaching staff to improve aspects identified in lesson observations, and take appropriate and prompt action where improvements do not have the desired impact.
- Sub-contracting arrangements are good and are managed well. Managers at Ixion maintain very good relationships with sub-contractors. In 2013/14 a few subcontractors needed further support to ensure that their apprentices made sufficient progress. Managers at Ixion put in a variety of relevant support, including speeding up apprentices' progress by modelling the benefit of conducting assessment in the work place and providing specialist teachers to help learners achieve functional skills. These actions enabled the large majority of apprentices to achieve their qualification, albeit later than planned.
- Managers evaluate their provision well in the self-assessment report and use accurate data to inform the process. Actions are monitored closely and, if necessary, managers ensure improvement through a group with a single focus and a tight deadline.
- Learners and apprentices benefit from the very high strategic and operational focus on the development of English and mathematics needed for successful completion of their qualification. A rapid response team of specialist teachers helps learners and apprentices to achieve functional skills. This results in significant increases in functional skills success rates. Further development of these skills beyond the level required by the qualification is encouraged but not prioritised.
- All staff promote equality of opportunity well. They provide appropriate equipment and good support to help learners with disabilities achieve as well as others. Through assessment of learners' starting points and good information, advice and guidance on career pathways, learners succeed and progress to further training or sustainable employment.
- Diversity is celebrated well. For example, managers identify the languages spoken by staff in all their offices, and make this information available to all staff so that learners with limited English language can communicate in their own language.
- **The governance of the provider:**
 - The board are very well informed by managers about provision and they use this information in conjunction with their wide experience of training and local and national priorities to challenge and support leaders and managers effectively to improve and adapt to meet changing needs.
 - Board meetings are well attended and held at Ixion's sites around the country, and arranged so that governors meet learners and staff at all levels regularly, giving them a more comprehensive understanding of the quality of provision.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- All staff are well trained in the Prevent duty. Ixion staff have good links with local agencies. Managers are now training staff in how to have conversations with students about extremism, radicalisation and British values.
- Learners and staff benefit from good information and support about forced marriage, female genital mutilation and trafficking. However, learners and apprentices do not have a good enough understanding of the threat of radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff make stringent health and safety checks on subcontractors' and employers' premises, and take action promptly to safeguard learners where necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The good teaching, learning and assessment practices are reflected in the very good outcomes for adult learners, the improving outcomes for apprentices and the large majority of learners who secure employment, self-employment or places on further or higher education and training courses.
- Most adult learners and apprentices enjoy their studies, and the large majority make good progress in improving their skills and knowledge. Adult learners include a minority who have multiple barriers to learning. Teaching staff challenge these learners well to make very good progress.
- An increasing proportion of current apprentices are making at least the progress expected of them due to teaching staff having taken a range of effective actions. These actions have, however, not yet had sufficient impact on improving the quality of targets that a minority of teaching staff set in learning plans, during learning visits and progress reviews. Short and medium target-setting, to help ensure all apprentices make good progress within agreed timescales, remains an area for further improvement.
- Teaching staff are well qualified and have extensive vocational experience. The large majority use their experience and skills well to plan and provide appropriate learning to meet the individual needs of learners and apprentices. As a result, most develop good vocational skills and a wide range of transferrable employment-related skills. For example, a business administration apprentice rapidly developed her database skills and took on the additional responsibility for maintaining her employer's confidential records.
- Teaching staff check on learning frequently, and use an appropriate range of assessment strategies to confirm that learners and apprentices have met their learning goals. Following assessment, learners and apprentices benefit from good oral feedback that identifies clearly what they do well and the areas that they need to improve. Teaching staff do not reinforce feedback sufficiently by providing equally detailed recorded feedback.
- Teaching staff use information and results from assessments well when learners start, to help learners improve their English and mathematical skills. Learners improve their levels of English and mathematics well in most learning activities, and managers have ensured that, for apprentices, this vital element is achieved earlier in their framework. Learners who need additional help in developing these skills receive good support from specialist functional skills tutors.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Learners and apprentices are motivated, behave well and show respect for each other and for staff. They enjoy their learning and the difference it makes to their employment opportunities. They improve their confidence levels and their self-esteem, which enables many to consider moving into employment or into starting their own business. Apprentices gain a good understanding of employee rights and responsibilities and apply the knowledge well in their job roles. Employers benefit from and value the skills and attitudes apprentices demonstrate in the workplace.
- Attendance and punctuality on adult learning courses are mostly good. The large majority of learners and apprentices develop their capacity to learn independently and develop new vocational, academic and business skills. The majority of learners and apprentices make the planned progress, of which they are capable, in developing their skills and achieving their qualifications in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

- Advice and guidance for learners' and apprentices' progression on to their next stage of their careers are good. Managers and staff provide effective support, help and advice, which learners and apprentices value. Many take up the opportunity to start their own business, move into employment or onto a higher level of study.
- Managers and teaching staff guide learners and apprentices well while completing their qualification. Teaching staff are responsive when learners and apprentices raise personal concerns, and ensure that they are able to access timely support and assistance from appropriately trained staff, covering a wide range of personal and social issues that affect their lives.
- Learners feel safe and staff deal with problems or issues effectively. Adult learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and benefit from being part of a diverse group of like-minded individuals. However, a majority of learners and apprentices do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of the threat of extremism and radicalisation.
- In a small minority of cases, learners do not have the opportunity to develop their deeper thinking skills. Teaching staff help them too much in the responses to questions posed to check understanding. Learners require a deeper understanding of the implications, for example, of arriving late for lessons or appointments in relation to the work environment.

Outcomes for learners are good

- For adult learners, the proportion achieving their qualifications is very high. The number of learners who complete their qualification, often from those who are hard to reach and have low starting points, has increased over the last three years and is above that of other providers nationally.
- Following a dip in performance in 2013/14, the number of apprentices who achieved their qualification in 2014/15 increased, and is now broadly in line with national averages. Current apprentices and trainees make good and expected progress towards the completion of their qualifications. However, a high proportion of apprentices have not achieved within their expected timescales, following the termination of three sub-contractor agreements for poor performance. Teaching staff provide good support for these apprentices and many are now re-engaged and are making progress to complete their qualifications.
- There are no significant achievement gaps between different groups of learners or apprentices. Following interventions from managers and teaching staff, the gap between female and male apprentices has closed. Managers monitor the performance of different groups of learners well.
- The few looked after children and care leavers achieve their qualifications well, in line with their peers on apprenticeship and traineeship programmes. Their attendance is good and effective advice, guidance and support aid their progress.
- The development of learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics skills is good and they benefit from good support in order to improve their literacy and numeracy levels. A large majority of learners achieve their qualifications in English and mathematics at the first attempt.
- Apprentices gain high quality vocational skills and a deeper understanding of their job roles and employer needs. For example, apprentices with the Royal Air Force gain a more thorough understanding of management skills and processes, such as how to present information to an audience in a management context.
- The number of learners and apprentices who successfully progress to further education or employment is high. A large majority of apprentices continue in their job roles, often bringing added value to the business for the benefit of their employers. A majority of adult learners, having completed their courses in enterprise or employability, either move into employment or become self-employed. Just over half of adult learners benefit from good support to start their own business.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes are good

- Adult learning provision includes short intensive courses at level 1 for unemployed learners aiming to progress into employment or self-employment. Learners with no prior English and mathematics qualifications at level 2 also work to improve these functional skills.
- Learners achieve very well on the adult programmes as a result of good teaching, learning and assessment. A very high proportion of learners achieve their qualifications, and the majority progress into self-employment or gain other employment. They improve their personal and social skills and behaviours quickly and so enhance their potential in gaining and sustaining employment. For example, learners work very collaboratively in teamwork, develop effective communication skills and reflect well on their performance.
- Skilled and knowledgeable teaching staff act as effective role models, and use a range of interesting and stimulating activities that motivate learners. For example, learners enjoy their interactive group-work. This helps learners develop effective skills and a good understanding of how to enter the world of business. Learners develop confidence and resilience, and persist in completing their tasks within challenging timescales.
- Teaching staff set specific and relevant personal goals for learners, and this helps them improve their skills and knowledge quickly. Arrangements for assessing learners' starting points are sufficiently rigorous to ensure personalised additional personal support for those learners who need it to complete their courses.
- Assessment of learner progress is thorough and accurate, and learners benefit from helpful and detailed feedback throughout their course. Learners understand what they need to do to improve their skills and knowledge. They participate well during sessions, reflecting on their progress and identifying their learning goals.
- Learners benefit from timely and relevant support and guidance, to help them produce well-pitched business plans, prepare for job interviews, make realistic plans for their future careers and realise their ambitions. A learner praised the mentor who supported him in setting up a market store highly. This supported work experience subsequently gave him the confidence to open on his own thriving restaurant in Central London successfully.
- Teaching staff develop learners' English and mathematics skills successfully. For example, they encourage learners to correct their spelling and grammar before presenting work related to qualities for entrepreneurship, or to take notes when watching films on how to make positive first impressions during a job interview. Learners apply their mathematics skills well when calculating cash-flow forecasts or personal survival budgets.
- Teaching staff develop learners' awareness of diversity successfully. Learners enjoy their safe and friendly learning environment and discussing the diverse qualities and backgrounds of their favourite entrepreneurs. They support and learn from their peers well, and develop effective networks with other people from different cultures, and of different genders and age. They treat each other and staff with respect and inappropriate behaviour is challenged well.
- Teaching staff do not always challenge the significant minority of more-able learners sufficiently and as a result, these learners do not always have the opportunity to achieve at the higher level they are capable of. Teaching staff do not always use questions sufficiently well to extend learning or arrange effective grouping to ensure more rapid progress. A few of these learners reported that they would have benefited from more comprehensive guidance at the end of their short courses.

- Ixion has 887 apprentices in eight subject areas, the majority specialising in health and social care and business and administration. Approximately half are advanced apprentices. Seven sub-contractors deliver just over a third of apprenticeship programmes on behalf of Ixion.
- The management of the apprenticeship programme has significantly improved in the last year and is now good. Successful interventions have taken place, including the recruitment of new teaching staff and improved performance management systems, with frequent observations of teaching, learning and assessment. These improvements have had a positive impact and the vast majority of current apprentices are making the progress expected of them.
- Teaching staff have good occupational experience and subject knowledge that they use well in coaching and assessment sessions to increase apprentices' knowledge and understanding. Teaching staff use a good variety of assessment methods. For example, the use of professional discussion as a key assessment method meets apprentices' needs very well, as does the new e-portfolio that is being introduced very effectively, albeit for few apprentices so far. Apprentices benefit from good support at frequent and comprehensive visits, as well as from the useful contact between these, to get feedback on their work.
- Apprentices develop their vocational skills very well, whether in health and social care, administration or other job roles. They become much more confident in work and develop good teamwork skills. They improve their understanding of progression opportunities from the good information and advice from teaching staff. The large majority of apprentices remain in employment or progress to further learning and benefit from good information about their future career opportunities.
- Apprentices demonstrate a high standard of professionalism in their job roles, taking on additional responsibilities during their apprenticeships. They improve their understanding of their employers' business and contribute very well. An intermediate business administration apprentice working in an independent optician has significantly increased product knowledge and understanding of customer needs, is able to provide very good customer service and can take on supervisory responsibilities to support the employer.
- Apprentices make good progress in their English, mathematics and ICT skills. They receive good support from teaching staff for skills such as percentages and fractions, as well as regular feedback on the quality of their spelling and grammar.
- Apprentices benefit from good oral feedback on completion of their assessments and performance reviews and are clear on how to further improve their performance in the future. However, teaching staff do not leave sufficient recorded feedback for future reference that apprentices and their employers can use effectively.
- Apprentices do not receive a sufficiently detailed learning plan at the start of their programme, to identify their specific skills development needs. Teaching staff match job roles to appropriate qualifications and levels effectively, but do not involve employers to agree and plan workplace training to meet apprentices' needs sufficiently.
- Employers are not sufficiently involved in the reviews of apprentices' progress to ensure they have a detailed understanding of the programme. Although teaching staff review qualification progress effectively, they do not review progress in job roles and skills development sufficiently or set targets effectively enough to ensure all apprentices make better progress early in their programme.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18/19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	6,148
Principal/CEO	Mr John Govett, CEO
Website address	

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	29	0	326	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	85	366	26	310	4	96		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	15		3		18			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learning Links ▪ Opportunities Workshop ▪ Sportwise ▪ John Frank Training Ltd ▪ Port of Tilbury ▪ Age UK 							

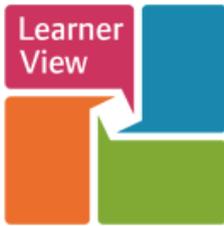
Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Stephen Hunsley, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Shackleton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Pauline Hawkesford	Ofsted Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Masterson	Ofsted Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the Chief Operating Officer, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. 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 students 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.

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