



Education and Training
Inspectorate

ApprenticeshipsNI Provision in
Riverpark Training and
Development (NI) Ltd

Report of a longitudinal inspection in
April and December 2014

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1. Context

Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd (Riverpark) is a private company limited by shares. It was formed in 2008 and specialises in providing industry-standard training and professional development for the vehicle accident repair industry across Northern Ireland. The company is owned by the managing director, who is supported by a business development manager, an administrator, a full-time professional and technical tutor and two part-time essential skills tutors; both the managing director and business development manager also deliver professional and technical training on the apprenticeship programmes.

Since August 2013, Riverpark has been contracted by the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) to provide the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. Currently, it delivers apprenticeship programmes at levels 2 and 3 in the professional and technical areas of business administration and transportation operations and maintenance.

All of the professional and technical training and the essential skills training for the apprenticeship programmes are delivered by staff from Riverpark at its training facility in Mallusk. Over a two year period, the apprentices attend a directed training block every four weeks; the first year apprentices attend for four days and the second year apprentices attend for three days. An additional half-day of training in each block is provided to facilitate those apprentices who need to complete their essential skills.

At the time of the inspection, 79 apprentices were registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme; 65 at level 2 and 14 at level 3. Of the 79 apprentices, 33 were on the vehicle body repair programme, 33 on the vehicle refinishing programme, nine on the vehicle parts programme, two on the mechanical, electrical and trim programme, and two apprentices were registered on business and administration at level 2. Forty-nine (62%) of the apprentices were undertaking training across the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and Information Communication Technology (ICT).

According to the information supplied by Riverpark, on entry to the apprenticeships training programme, 59% (47) of the apprentices hold four or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C or equivalent qualifications, and 43% (34) of them have four or more GSCE passes at grades A* to C including English and mathematics or equivalent qualifications. Most of the apprentices (75%) hold 4 or more GCSEs at grades A*-G or equivalent qualifications.

2. Overall finding

Overall, the quality of training provided by Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd is good.

Summary of key findings

Overall performance level	Good
Achievements and Standards	Very Good
Quality of Provision for Learning	Good
Leadership and Management	Good

Professional and technical areas performance levels	
Essential Skills	Satisfactory
Transportation Operations and Maintenance	Very Good

What does Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd need to do to improve?

- Improve the quality of the provision for the essential skills.
- Improve further the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes to identify more clearly the areas for improvement in the apprenticeship provision.
- Enhance and clarify further the co-ordination roles of the staff to enable them to support more effectively the operational management of the provision.
- Improve the quality of the teaching, training and learning in a minority of the directed training sessions across the provision.

3. Key findings of the inspection

3.1 Achievements and standards are very good.

The standards of the apprentices' occupational skills are mostly very good or better. They make very good progress during the practical training sessions in acquiring the hand skills needed to repair vehicles to an industry standard. Most of the apprentices are well-motivated, keen to learn, confident and take pride in their work. They acquire and demonstrate a positive attitude to their work and training and achieve high standards of work in the workplace, which is reinforced through the positive feedback from employers and the high performance level achieved by a small number of the apprentices in external competitions. In addition, the apprentices develop good interpersonal skills through their interactions with customers and colleagues.

The apprentices' oral communication skills are mostly good or better and their numeracy skills are at a good standard; they can, for example, talk confidently about the tasks they are undertaking, measure and mark out their work accurately and calculate the correct paint mixing ratios. The standards of their written communication skills are more variable and for a minority of the apprentices are just satisfactory; while the content of their professional and technical written work is appropriate, insufficient care is taken by them to present the work to a good enough standard. On too many occasions, there is regular incorrect use of punctuation and poor spelling.

Since the beginning of the ApprenticeshipsNI contract, most (87%) of the apprentices working at level 2, and nearly all (93%) of the apprentices working at level 3, have been retained. Most (89%) of the level 3 apprentices, who have just completed their training, have achieved their full framework qualification. While most of the level 2 apprentices are making good progress in their professional and technical units, their progress in the essential skills is too slow, particularly in literacy and numeracy; a significant minority of apprentices in year two of their programme have not yet completed any of their essential skills qualifications.

3.2 The quality of provision for learning is good.

The quality of the practical skills training provided for the vehicle repair apprentices is consistently very good. The sessions are well-planned, a key feature of which is the strong emphasis placed on developing the apprentices' practical skills and technical knowledge through the completion of real-life vehicle repair projects and simulated repair tasks. As a consequence, they are prepared well to contribute effectively to their workplaces. The effective use of workplace mentors by the employers demonstrates best practice and a

commitment to providing the apprentices with the necessary support, guidance and challenge to allow them to further develop and apply their skills and competences. For the business administration apprentices, a virtual office is currently being developed to provide them with a 'live' working environment to underpin the development of their skills and competences.

The quality of the teaching, training and learning in the professional and technical theory sessions is mostly good. While the sessions are mostly well-planned and focus appropriately on developing the apprentices' knowledge and understanding of safe working practices and modern repair techniques, they are overly tutor-led and do not provide sufficient stretch and challenge for the more-able apprentices. Too little emphasis is placed by the apprentices, and their professional and technical tutors, on further developing their ability to write accurately and coherently and there is limited evidence of marking for improvement in their work. More support is needed to help them to improve and embed further their literacy skills. In the essential skills sessions, the quality of the teaching and learning is mostly satisfactory. The learning is not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all of the apprentices and the essential skills are not well contextualised or embedded into the apprentices' professional and technical work.

While management have developed processes to review the quality of teaching, training and learning, they are not implemented rigorously and the documentation used is excessive. Weaknesses in teaching, training and learning are not being clearly enough identified and action needs to be taken to improve the quality of the teaching, training and learning in the theory sessions. In addition, the effective use of information learning technology (ILT) to support teaching, training and learning is not yet exploited fully.

The assessment arrangements for the professional and technical training are very good. An electronic portfolio is used effectively to support the regular reviewing, tracking and recording of the apprentices' progress. The apprentices and their employers are well-informed of their overall progress, although more specific guidance relating to assessment evidence required from the workplace is needed. While relevant assessment tasks have been developed for the essential skills they are not linked sufficiently to the professional and technical areas. The outcomes of the initial and diagnostic assessments in literacy and numeracy are not used well by the tutors to plan effectively for the apprentices' learning and progression. It is also a concern that all of the apprentices target only level 1 in ICT, irrespective of their prior learning experiences or ability.

The quality of the apprentices' personal training plans is good. The plans are detailed and contain clear milestones and training targets. They are linked effectively to the electronic portfolios, the monitoring and review process, and they are updated on a regular basis to show the progress made by the apprentices.

The quality of the pastoral care provided for the apprentices is very good. They are well-supported by the tutors both in their directed training and in the workplace. A strong emphasis is also placed on matching apprentices, as far as possible, with an employer best suited to their personal situation and training needs. Only a small number of the apprentices have been identified as having additional learning support needs and are receiving appropriate one-to-one support. Appropriate links have been developed to relevant support agencies. The pastoral care policy needs to be updated to include more detail and better inform the apprentices of the learning support available to them and this information also needs to be more clearly articulated during the apprentices' induction programme.

The quality of the provision for careers education, information advice and guidance is mostly good. A majority of the apprentices interviewed in focus groups are aware of possible career progression pathways. Staff have also been proactive in engaging with the Department's careers service and plan to engage further with local post-primary schools through an 'Ambassador Programme' aimed at educating young people about careers in the motor repair industry.

3.3 The quality of the leadership and management is good.

Riverpark is managed effectively at a strategic level and has developed a wide range of links and partnerships with relevant employers, industry bodies, and other key stakeholders. The organisation is making an important contribution to economic and workforce development through the provision of a relevant curriculum offer and high quality practical training which are aligned well to industry needs. At an operational level, however, the roles and responsibilities of staff are not clearly enough defined and there is overlap in the work that they carry out. As a consequence, it is not always clear who has responsibility for the management and co-ordination of the apprenticeship programmes, in particular the important essential skills aspect.

The processes in place for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning are underdeveloped. The self-evaluation report is overly descriptive and does not identify clearly enough key areas for improvement across the provision, such as the quality of the provision for the essential skills. In addition, the areas for development identified are not prioritised sufficiently in the quality improvement plan and meaningful targets, against which progress can be measured, are not well defined.

Staff are well-qualified and experienced in the delivery of training programmes and continually update and refresh their skills through their links with industry. They are also provided with good opportunities to undertake continuous professional development.

The quality of the training accommodation and the practical training and learning resources is very good. The training workshop is well-equipped to industry-standard and an additional training workshop has been recently opened and is being refurbished to the same level. A significant investment has also been made in the acquisition of high quality practical training and learning resources, including industry-standard online learning packages and ILT equipment to support and enhance training, learning and assessment.

On the basis of the evidence available at the time of the inspection Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd has satisfactory arrangements in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. These arrangements broadly reflect the guidance issued by the Department but the following areas need to be addressed:

- a more formal e-safety policy needs to be developed including the provision of information on social networking issues; and
- Increased signage should be displayed to identify the designated safeguarding officers.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the quality of training in Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd is good. The organisation has important strengths in most of its educational and pastoral provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the organisation has demonstrated the capacity to address. The Education and Training Inspectorate will monitor the organisation's progress on the areas for improvement.

5. Professional and technical area reports

5.1 ESSENTIAL SKILLS

Key Findings

In the essential skills, the quality of training provided by Riverpark is satisfactory.

Context

Riverpark provides the essential skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT to apprentices registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. The entry profile of the apprentices is variable with approximately 52% of them holding GCSE passes in English and mathematics at grade A*-C or an equivalent qualification. Currently, 62% of the apprentices need to complete one or more of the three essential skills to meet the requirements of their framework.

The achievements and standards are satisfactory.

Attendance by the apprentices at the essential skills sessions is good. The standard of most of their oral communication skills is good or better and they engage and participate well in class discussions and activities. The standard of work in the apprentices' essential skills assessment portfolios is mainly good. There is, however, significant variation in the quality of their written work and, for a minority of the apprentices, it is just satisfactory. Key errors made by them include the inappropriate use of capital letters, general punctuation errors and poor spelling; there is limited evidence of marking for improvement from the professional and technical tutors or the provision of appropriate support to help them address these basic literacy skills. It is also inappropriate that all of those apprentices who need to complete an essential skill in ICT are working towards the level 1 qualification, resulting in a significant lack of challenge for the more able learners.

All of the level 3 apprentices who will shortly be completing their training programme have successfully completed the essential skills needed to achieve their full framework qualification. In contrast, the progress in learning of those apprentices who are working at level 2 and who have been on their programme for just over a year is too slow, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Consequently, just over one-half of them have achieved only their essential skill in ICT.

The quality of the provision for learning is satisfactory.

The quality of the teaching, training and learning in the sessions observed ranged from good to satisfactory, but was mainly satisfactory. While the apprentices were provided with good individual support by the tutors, the pace of the lessons was mostly too slow, the learning was not sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all of the apprentices and the provision was largely assessment-led. Communication between the essential skills and the professional and technical tutors is weak and opportunities to use more appropriate vocationally-related contexts in the classroom learning tasks are not being exploited sufficiently. As a result, the essential skills are not being transferred or embedded well in the apprentices' professional and technical work. While all of the apprentices complete an initial and diagnostic assessment in literacy and numeracy, the outcomes are not used effectively by the tutors to plan for the apprentices' learning and progression; no group learning plans are in place and the model of delivery is not currently meeting well enough the needs of all of the apprentices.

The quality of the leadership and management is satisfactory.

The provision for the essential skills is not well co-ordinated and, at present, is not given a high enough priority across the organisation. Better opportunities need to be developed to allow the essential skills and the professional and technical tutors to plan and work together, in particular to share good practice and improve the contextualisation of the essential skills within the apprentices' vocational work. The processes used to monitor the progress being made by the apprentices in their learning also need to be reviewed and further developed. Staff are appropriately qualified and the quality of the accommodation and learning resources, including ILT, used for the delivery of the essential skills is appropriate. The self-evaluation and improvement planning processes, however, lack rigour and do not identify or address key areas for improvement in the provision.

5.2 TRANSPORTATION OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Key findings

In transportation operations and maintenance, the quality of training provided by Riverpark is very good.

Context

Currently, 68 apprentices are registered on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme; 33 of them are in vehicle body repair, 33 in vehicle refinishing, and two in mechanical, electrical and trim. Most of the apprentices progressed from post-primary schools and are employed in vehicle accident repair centres across Northern Ireland.

Achievement and standards are very good.

The standard of the apprentices' occupational skills is mostly very good, and on occasions outstanding. They make very good progress in acquiring the necessary hand skills to repair vehicles to an appropriate industry standard. Most of the apprentices are keen to learn, take pride in their work and are increasingly confident in their abilities. They can, for example, replace damaged vehicle body sections using appropriate techniques, prepare efficiently panels for refinishing and spray paint with minimum subsequent polishing. A few of the apprentices are highly motivated and excel in developing their skills to an exceptional standard; in 2013, for example, two apprentices competed successfully in the World Skills competition. This high level of success is used well to encourage others to achieve high standards of work; currently three apprentices are preparing for World Skills 2015.

The apprentices' numeracy skills are developed to an acceptable standard; they can, for example, measure and mark out accurately and calculate the correct paint mixing ratios. While their oral communication skills are developed sufficiently, their written communication skills are too variable. A minority of them place too little emphasis on developing their ability to write coherently and accurately. Most (78%) of the apprentices who commenced their training in 2013/14 have been retained, and all of those who commenced in 2014/15 are still on the apprenticeship programme.

The quality of the provision for learning is very good.

The quality of the practical skills training provided for the apprentices is consistently very good. In the directed training, a strong emphasis is placed on developing their practical skills and technical knowledge through the completion of real-life vehicle repair projects and simulated repair tasks. Appropriately, they spend a significant proportion of their training

time in the training workshops repairing damaged vehicles and practising key occupational skills. Consequently, the apprentices are prepared well for working on customers' vehicles in their workplace. In the workplace, they have very good opportunities to apply and refine their skills and knowledge. Workplace mentors provide them with effective support, guidance and challenge in order for them to gain further confidence and ability.

The quality of the theory training is mostly good. The sessions are well-planned and focus appropriately on developing the apprentices' knowledge and understanding of safe working practices and modern repair techniques. They engage well in verbal questioning and discussions, drawing on their workplace experiences to good effect. Their written responses are mostly not good enough; they are often too brief with uncorrected spelling and grammatical errors. The strategies to support and encourage the apprentices to improve their writing skills are underdeveloped.

The assessment arrangements are very good. An electronic portfolio underpins effectively regular and rigorous recording, tracking and reviewing of the apprentices' progress. Although they are, along with their employers, well-informed of their overall progress, the ongoing guidance relating to assessment evidence required from the workplace is not specific enough.

The quality the leadership and management is very good.

Through a persistent focus on providing training that is flexible, aligned well to industry needs and equips apprentices with the appropriate practical skills, Riverpark has established an excellent reputation for delivering high quality training. It has established excellent links with a wide range of employers, other training organisations, schools and careers officers. As a result, it is making an important contribution to economic and workforce development in this sector.

The quality of the training facilities is mostly outstanding. Riverpark has invested heavily in providing well-equipped industry standard training workshops. The workshops, in conjunction with the provision of modern vehicles to repair, provide the apprentices with a sector-leading learning resource to develop the apprentices' practical skills to a high standard. There is also a good range of industry-standard software packages to support the training. Appropriately, work is underway to upgrade the ICT infrastructure to better support the use of the contemporary software.

The tutors are well-qualified, experienced and engage regularly in continuous professional development. They are highly committed to supporting the apprentices achieve their full potential; they often go the 'extra mile' to ensure each apprentice progresses at the most appropriate pace, including supporting the more able apprentices to participate in competitions. While there is a clear and effective focus on maintaining high quality practical training for the apprentices, more thought needs to be given to further improving the pedagogic practice in the theory sessions.

6. Inspection method and evidence base

The inspection was carried out in two phases; the first phase took place in April 2014 and the second phase in December 2014. The inspection focused on:

- the quality of the leadership and management of the organisation;
- the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes;

- the achievements and standards; and
- the quality of provision for training and learning.

The key questions and quality indicators which guide inspection and self-evaluation in these three aspects of training supplier organisations, which were applied to this inspection, are available in the ETI's publication *Improving Quality: Raising Standards Work-based Learning* <http://www.eti.gov.uk/index/improving-quality-raising-standards/improving-quality-raising-standards-iqrs-work-based-learning.htm>

A team of four inspectors observed a total of 34 apprentices in 12 directed training sessions. Inspectors visited 18 workplaces and spoke to 22 apprentices. A total of 21 apprentices were interviewed in focus groups with inspectors. The inspectors also held discussions with the managing director, administrator, business development manager, tutors, employers and workplace supervisors. In addition, inspectors examined samples of the apprentices' work, the tutors' schemes of work and lesson plans and the apprentices' personal training plans. The organisation's self-evaluation report and other relevant inspection documentation were also scrutinised.

The inspection also focused on the arrangements for care, support and guidance and safeguarding of vulnerable groups. The arrangements for the inspection included the opportunity for the apprentices to complete a confidential online questionnaire prior to the inspection.

The returns show that a majority of the apprentices are positive about their training programme. In particular, they felt that they are getting good practical training experiences and are making good progress on their training programme.

Questionnaire	Number issued	Number returned	Percentage returned (%)	Number with comments
Apprentices	50	34	68	4

7. Information about Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd

Current registrations by programme

Programme	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 2	65	82
ApprenticeshipsNI Level 3	14	18
Total	79	100

Current registrations by professional and technical area

Professional and technical area	Number of apprentices	% of total registrations
Business Administration	2	3
Vehicle Accident Body Repair	33	42
Vehicle Accident Repair Mechanical, Electrical and Trim	2	3
Vehicle Parts Operations	9	11
Vehicle Accident Repair Paint (Refinishing)	33	41
Total	79	100%

Qualifications of current apprentices on entry to their programme

Programme	ApprenticeshipsNI (%)
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C including English and mathematics	43
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-C	59
(%) of apprentices with GCSE English and mathematics or equivalent at Grades A*-C	52
(%) of apprentices with 4 or more GCSEs or equivalent at Grades A*-G	75
(%) of apprentices with no prior level 1 or level 2 qualifications	0

Note: All data was sourced from Riverpark Training and Development (NI) Ltd at the time of the inspection.

8. Quantitative terms used by the ETI

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	-	more than 90%
Most	-	75%-90%
A majority	-	50%-74%
A significant minority	-	30%-49%
A minority	-	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	-	less than 10%

Performance levels

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) use the following performance levels in reports:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

Key Performance Indicators

Key Performance Indicators and Definitions	
Retention	The percentage of enrolments at week 4 of year one who completed their occupational training framework, measured over the full duration of their course.
Achievement	The percentage of trainees/apprentices who completed their occupational training framework and who fully achieved their framework qualification.
Progression	The percentage of successful completers who progressed to further/higher education/training or employment.

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