

# Virgin Trains Sales Limited

Monitoring visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	58513
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Jules Steele HMI
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	Employer
<b>Address:</b>	Virgin Trains Talent Academy Tatton House Crewe CW1 6ZD

## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of a series of monitoring visits to a sample of new apprenticeship training providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

Virgin Trains Sales Limited (Virgin Trains) is a train operating company in the United Kingdom owned by Virgin Rail Group that operates the InterCity West Coast franchise. Virgin Trains provide long-distance passenger services on the West Coast Main Line between London, the west midlands, north-west England, and north Wales. In 2017, Virgin Trains, as an employer provider, began providing apprenticeships in level 2 customer care and level 3 team leader. Currently, 96 apprentices are studying towards level 2 and 14 are studying towards level 3 qualifications.

### Themes

#### **How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?**

#### **Significant progress**

Leaders and managers share a vision to provide high-quality apprenticeship training that will prepare their staff fully for the wide range of career opportunities available to them within the transport industry. Pre-apprenticeship programmes, together with apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3, provide a broad range of training that relates closely to the career paths available. Apprentices understand clearly from the first day on programme how their qualifications will secure them the skills and knowledge they will need to be successful in their chosen career and become valued employees.

Leaders and managers communicate very effectively their passion for apprentices to be 'the best that they can be'. Apprentices are proud to work and study with Virgin Trains. They wear their uniforms with pride, and work enthusiastically to offer a high-quality travelling experience for their customers.

Managers have rightly designed training to focus on ensuring that apprentices develop the new skills, knowledge and behaviours they need to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship standards. Well-organised training programmes ensure that when apprentices join their on-board crew members, they are able to participate in providing high-quality service. Apprentices know how the work-based tasks and activities they carry out, together with the new knowledge and behaviours they acquire, prepare them effectively to pass their end-point assessment. Almost all apprentices are new employees directly recruited onto the apprenticeship programmes.

Leaders have recruited managers and trainers with expert specialist vocational experience. All have worked within Virgin Trains and understand fully the high standards of customer service expected. They act as highly effective role models for apprentices, who recognise that trainers speak with authority and knowledge. Physical training resources are of the highest standard and include a comprehensively equipped central training academy, and a fully functioning train.

Apprentices benefit from additional qualifications, such as first aid and fire safety, as well as trips, visits and external speakers that enrich their learning. For example, presentations from the Samaritans give them a good insight into the vulnerabilities of others and talks on behalf of the British Transport Police help them to understand the various external agencies who work in partnership with the transport industry, and the purpose of their roles.

Governance arrangements ensure that executive leaders know clearly how apprentices are progressing. Managers report quarterly to executive leaders, detailing the progress learners make and how managers refine training in response to apprentices' and their supervisors' feedback. Executive leaders expect to know whether apprentices are making good progress, the reasons why they are making the progress they are, and what actions managers take to secure high-quality learning and attainment.

Apprentices and their supervisors have a good understanding of the apprenticeship programme. Supervisors know when apprentices will be studying in the training academy and what tasks and activities apprentices need to undertake when they are at work, to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours required of their qualification. Managers have worked effectively with the few supervisors and crew members that didn't understand fully the requirements of an apprenticeship programme, where this led to a small proportion of apprentices making slower than expected progress at the start of their programme.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Reasonable progress**

Supervisors are enthusiastic about the positive impact apprentices have on providing high-quality customer service. Apprentices are highly motivated to learn the new skills, knowledge and behaviours they require to undertake their job successfully. The training that apprentices receive relates effectively to their challenging job roles and prepares them successfully to be high-performing crew members. Almost all apprentices who started their training remain in learning, and all have secure employment on completion of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices analyse customer feedback for their individual teams and use this information to enhance the service they provide. As a result, they understand the different needs and requirements of the travelling public. For example, they demonstrate empathy when dealing with customers who are frail and elderly. They

show good problem-solving skills with passengers who have boarded the wrong train and/or become separated from their travelling companions.

Apprentices receive frequent visits and training while on board trains and going about their working duties. Assessment in the workplace is detailed. Trainers accurately record the progress apprentices make against the occupational standards of their qualification. In the latter part of last year, industrial action taken by crew members resulted in apprentices not receiving the visits and assessments planned. Managers and trainers work hard to ensure that this does not adversely affect the progress of apprentices nearing their end-point assessment. Almost all are on target to complete in the time planned.

Managers have implemented appropriate quality monitoring processes for all elements of the training they provide. Lead trainers work closely with the awarding body to ensure that the work apprentices produce is of the standard required. Trainers carefully consider and plan for the first group of apprentices who will take their end-point assessment. Apprentices feel confident to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and feel prepared fully by their trainers.

Managers use quality assurance measures to review effectively the standard of apprentices' work and the quality of the feedback they receive from their trainers. They correctly identify that trainers' feedback should be strengthened to enable apprentices to know more clearly what they have done well, and how they could improve.

Managers and trainers carefully track the progress apprentices make against developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to acquire to complete the occupational standards element of their qualification. Managers' planning sets clear indicators for what apprentices should have achieved, and by when. Managers' recording of trainers' follow-up actions for the small proportion of apprentices making slower progress is insufficiently detailed. As part of their risk assessment of apprentices' progress, managers do not include the progress apprentices make against their English and mathematics qualifications.

### **How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress**

Senior leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Managers and trainers have established a culture of safeguarding where apprentices learn quickly how to keep themselves safe when at work and understand how to maintain their customers' safety while travelling on the rail network. For example, customer service apprentices routinely practise evacuation procedures, and are very familiar with how to evacuate passengers safely from trains and transport hubs in a wide range of potential emergencies. Apprentices on team leader standards develop effectively their reflective practice in how best to deal appropriately with passengers. This includes dealing with passengers who may be lost and confused, are travelling

with the wrong ticket for the journey they are making, or who have become angry and aggressive.

Apprentices feel safe and are safe while at work and are careful to put in place the training they receive. Managers and trainers instil high standards of maintaining health and safety at work, which apprentices readily adopt. Apprentices know how to be personally safe when travelling to and from their place of work, often at unsociable hours.

Senior leaders and managers carry out safe recruiting and selection procedures when employing staff. Managers keep appropriate records of the suitability of staff to work with apprentices, a small proportion of whom are vulnerable adults who have served custodial sentences, or who have complex learning needs, such as autistic spectrum disorder.

Managers have recently reviewed the recruitment procedures for apprentices and have taken actions to strengthen the existing effective safeguarding procedures. Trainers are extending the range of external partners they work with in response to the welfare needs they recognise apprentices have. Managers have nominated a key staff member as the designated safeguarding officer (DSO), and plans are in place to ensure that the DSO receives enhanced training.

Managers and trainers ensure that apprentices have a broad understanding of the threats posed by those who hold radical views. Apprentices know how to be vigilant to the signs that might indicate a person may be vulnerable to extremism or is acting in a manner that might identify they intend to cause harm to others. Apprentices know to whom they should take such concerns, and the importance of taking prompt action.

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