

Lean Education and Development Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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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.

Lean Education and Development Limited (LEAD) is a private independent learning provider based in Hagley, Stourbridge in the West Midlands. The company is owned by two directors. It specialises in the delivery of level 2 apprenticeships in improving operational performance (business improvement techniques). The majority of learners are adults employed across the country in sectors such as manufacturing, engineering, aerospace, automotive, healthcare, financial and public services. In May 2017, LEAD became a prime-contract independent training provider. Before that, it operated as a subcontractor to several general further education colleges for six years. At the time of the visit, LEAD had 475 learners studying for a level 2 framework in improving operational performance with 38 employers across the country. Almost all learners are either first-line supervisors and/or managers. The largest numbers of learners are in the logistics sector, followed by manufacturing.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Directors have a clear vision and well-considered strategy to become a high-performing provider of learning. By focusing on a single area of learning and a single framework, they have created a niche market for their work. Staff, directors and managers are knowledgeable and experienced. They have a strong determination and the necessary skills to make a positive difference to the productivity of businesses from a wide range of employment sectors.

Directors and senior managers have a good mix of skills, such as implementing 'lean' processes in world-class businesses, and in training and teaching. They have worked diligently to consolidate the learning they gained through working as a subcontractor to four different colleges. They have appointed new staff with expertise in data management and compliance to meet funding body and quality assurance requirements. This means that accurate and live data and other information are readily available to enable the monitoring of the performance of learners and coaches. Directors have revised management team roles to ensure that the managers respond swiftly to requests for training and improvements to improve learners' and employers' experiences.

In a short space of time, leaders and managers have expanded the provision successfully across the country. They have established their reputation among employers from a wide range of sectors and are well prepared to expand their work to other sectors.

Directors and managers have rapidly established learner records and data sets for their direct-levy contract to report on recruitment and performance of learners by tutor, employer, cohort and elements of programmes. Managers use this information to monitor performance, and analyse performance to take action to improve aspects of training. They recognise the need to conduct an even deeper analysis of data, and take subsequent action to make improvements. For example, the first-time pass rates for learners on level 1 mathematics were lower than those for English. Managers were aware of this but did not analyse the data in sufficient depth or set an action plan to improve performance.

Leaders and managers have established exceptionally strong and trusting relationships with employers. They visit employers to seek to understand their business, and then design bespoke programmes to meet precisely the training needs of the business. For example, managers and coaches helped the employer with the largest number of learners to target first-line managers rather than middle managers, to maximise the impact of training. Workers from across departments are brought together in a group to learn the 'lean' principles. Training is provided at times and places to fit in with the peaks and troughs of the businesses.

Staff are highly qualified in business improvement techniques in their employment sectors. They possess good technical knowledge and have a strong record of making improvements in their businesses. All coaches have passed level 2 qualifications in English and mathematics and most have an assessor qualification. They provide excellent coaching for learners and set a challenging pace in lessons. However, most do not have teaching qualifications. Managers recognise that they need to enhance the classroom skills of their coaches in specific aspects of teaching practice, such as introducing and closing the sessions, focusing more closely on extending skills beyond the requirements of the qualifications, recapping and providing constructive feedback to further consolidate learners' analytical ability and skills.

The programmes meet the needs of employers and learners particularly well. Learners gain new knowledge and put it into practice to benefit their employers. This blend of theory and practical work was described by one employer as 'rubber meeting the road'.

The programme meets the requirements of an apprenticeship. Learners receive their full entitlement to 20% off-the-job learning, the development of English and mathematics skills alongside the main programme, the technical certificate and the diploma. Employers work closely with managers and coaches to ensure that learners meet or exceed the requirements for off-the-job training. However, managers recognise that they have some work to do to convince learners, particularly those

with higher-level qualifications, to undertake English and mathematics qualifications and further develop these skills for their next career steps.

Managers have prepared well to implement the apprenticeship standards. They have taken all the necessary steps, such as mapping the skills of the coaches, to implement standards from September 2018. However, due to a lack of clarity from the examination and validating bodies about the end-point assessment arrangements, managers cannot advance any further. Employers wish to improve the skills of their employees further by enrolling their learners on the next level of programmes at level 3 or 4.

Two directors and a non-executive member with expertise in accounting make up the board of the company. They scrutinise the work of the company regularly and rigorously. The reports to the board are heavily focused on finance, business performance and learners' and employers' satisfaction, with information on various monitoring visits taken by managers to sites. The current board members do not seek routinely reports on the quality of learners' experience and therefore are not able to scrutinise the quality of training well enough. They do not currently support and challenge managers to benchmark themselves against the best in the sector. Leaders and senior managers hold staff to account routinely to ensure that all coaches, managers and staff do their jobs well.

Leaders and managers know their provision well. The self-assessment report for the provision, including the subcontracted provision, is detailed, analytical and self-critical. The quality improvement plan includes appropriate actions to improve weaker aspects. However, it lacks interim monitoring milestones to enable leaders and managers to monitor easily the progress made against these actions.

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

Managers have developed a well-structured programme to deliver the apprenticeship programme. Learners' progress is carefully monitored.

Coaches plan the sessions in detail and have developed good-quality learning resources and activities. Managers have set clear milestones for assessment. Learners make good progress in the various components of the apprenticeship: the technical certificate; the diploma; personal learning and thinking skills; and employment rights and responsibilities. Coaches adapt the learning resources well to the sector in which the learners work. They integrate well the development of mathematics and English into learning activities. Where learners miss training sessions, coaches support them well to catch up. Employers spoken to by inspectors during the monitoring visit regard the training as of consistently good quality.

Coaches provide clear explanations of new concepts to apprentices. They make effective links between theory and practice, which improves apprentices' learning and motivation. Coaches effectively integrate problem-solving activities and teamworking into learning activities. As a result, learners improve these skills.

In a few cases, coaches do not provide consistently good-quality written feedback to learners that identifies what they need to improve and how they may do this. This is particularly the case in English. Coaches do not systematically follow up on mistakes to check that learners make the necessary corrections. However, managers are aware of this area for improvement and have already initiated a pilot project where coaches report on these areas more systematically. All learners are encouraged to achieve a level 2 qualification in English and mathematics – beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. This prepares them well for future training and improves their skills in carrying out their jobs. Some three quarters of learners require qualifications in English and mathematics, and under a half have already passed their level 1 qualifications in both these subjects.

Learners understand the 'Lean Six Sigma' principles of an in-depth systematic approach to improve business processes, including productivity and efficiency. They analyse problems to find the root causes and their impact on the business, and debate as a team how to solve the problem. As a team, they design and cost a project, calculate the return on investment and prepare and deliver successfully a presentation to pitch to senior managers. This sharpens their analytical skills, confidence and communication skills. Learners demonstrate a high level of business awareness and can identify their role in the business. Learners in the administration, finance or services sectors gain an awareness of how the principles of engineering and manufacturing can apply to their sectors, after initial misgivings on their part. However, managers recognise that they have further work to do to show the benefits and implications of 'lean' principles to learners in these sectors.

Learners improve their confidence, teamworking skills and understanding of business practice, and improve efficiency within their companies. Employers give learners the freedom to experiment with their learning and apply the 'lean' principles to their business. As a result, learners strive to make the business more competitive by improving processes. For example, in a logistics company, learners streamlined the way in which parts were delivered in an automotive plant, practising 'just-in-time' working principles. This improved the efficiency of the plant and reduced the need for a worker in a shift.

Learners enjoy learning. They begin to think like a business owner, an attitude and behaviour that employers value highly. They increase their knowledge, take a holistic view of their employers' businesses and develop a deeper understanding of customers' requirements. They understand well how to add value to the employers' business. This improves the learners' confidence and morale, as they rightly feel more skilled and competent.

Learners are aware of their options after the completion of their apprenticeships. They are encouraged to think about their career pathway in the business. However, a handful of learners with degrees or other higher-level qualifications from their home countries are not made aware of the value and currency of their qualifications in the United Kingdom. They are not referred to agencies to help determine how they can top them up to get ahead in their careers.

Arrangements for quality assuring assessment activities are thorough. They include the regular sampling of learners' work, discussions with learners and observations of assessments. Managers collate and monitor the outcomes of these processes and have a risk rating for sites and coaches that informs the quality improvement plan. Managers carry out and collate learner surveys to get an insight into learners' experience of the programme to make improvements. Currently, these are carried out at the end of the year and therefore do not help managers to have a positive impact on the experience of current learners.

Internal quality assurers review the standards of apprentices' work on a regular basis to ensure that the quality of learners' work is maintained at a high standard. They provide feedback to tutors on how they can improve. Consequently, the standard of learners' work is consistently high.

In their observations, observers do not focus sufficiently on the impact of coaches' actions on learners' skills development. Following observations, staff identify actions to improve aspects of teaching and learning and improve their practice. Directors and managers recognise that they need to observe all aspects of learning, such as exit interviews, and deploy more staff to undertake observations.

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

Directors and managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. They have devised appropriate safeguarding and prevention-of-extremism policies and update them regularly. All staff have undertaken safeguarding training, and the vast majority have received recent updated training on the 'Prevent' duty.

All learners receive information on safeguarding, British values and the 'Prevent' duty at induction. Coaches reinforce this well with learners during reviews by using a bank of questions. The majority of learners have a reasonable understanding of these issues. However, they need to improve their understanding of how they apply this to their work and everyday lives. All learners are clear about who to speak to if they have any concerns. Learners feel safe and work in safe environments.

Directors and senior managers have ensured that they operate safe recruitment practices when employing new staff. Managers carry out appropriate background

checks on staff. All staff, including those who are office-based, undergo a vetting and security check.

LEAD has a designated safeguarding officer who has received appropriate training. Managers have identified someone to deputise should he be absent. To date, there have been no incidents to record or report. The designated officer is aware of whom to contact externally if any issues arise.

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