

Learndirect Apprenticeships 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. Ofsted's intention to carry out monitoring visits to these new providers was first announced by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in November 2017. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

Learndirect Apprenticeships Ltd (LDA) commenced trading in 2016 and began training apprenticeships funded by the new levy in May 2017. LDA currently trains around 3,900 apprentices; 80% of apprentices are on standards-based programmes and 20% follow framework programmes. Almost 70% of apprentices are on programmes at level 2, and 25% at level 3. A small proportion of apprentices are on programmes at levels 4 and 5. The largest vocational area is retail and commercial enterprise, with over half of all apprentices. Business, administration and law is the second largest vocational area, with around a quarter of apprentices. A small number of apprentices are on programmes in health, public services and care and in engineering and manufacturing technologies.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders have implemented a clear strategy to provide apprenticeships in carefully selected subject areas. They work with a range of employers, many of them high-profile and prestigious companies. Leaders have decided not to work with certain employers or in certain subject areas where they consider that the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision cannot be met. Managers work with senior leaders in the companies to ensure that the employers have a sound understanding of the requirements of an apprenticeship. They also help employers to develop programmes that meet these requirements, particularly in retail and business administration. At senior level, employers demonstrate a strong understanding of the requirements of an apprenticeship and their obligations, in particular the requirement to provide sufficient off-the-job training.

Over four fifths of apprentices are in organisations that have recruited large numbers of apprentices. Communication between LDA staff and these employers is frequent and effective, and enables the content of the apprenticeship to be closely tailored to the needs of the business. LDA managers respond quickly when training needs to improve or issues need to be resolved. For example, in one large employer dialogue between the employer and LDA managers resulted in a large event bringing all

apprentices together to share their experiences and collaborate in learning activities. For the much smaller proportion of employers that have recruited only a few apprentices, the relationship and communication between LDA staff and employers is less effective. These employers are not always as aware of the progress that apprentices make, and line managers demonstrate a weaker understanding of an apprenticeship and their responsibilities to their apprentices.

The vast majority of apprentices are receiving their entitlement to off-the-job training. LDA managers monitor carefully the proportion of apprentices who receive their entitlement, and are acutely aware of apprentices who are not yet receiving their full entitlement. They take action quickly, when necessary, to increase the amount of off-the-job training that takes place. A few line managers do not ensure that apprentices receive their full allocation of training or that the off-the-job-training is sufficiently well planned, and LDA managers work effectively with employers to rectify this swiftly.

Most apprentices learn new skills and knowledge as part of their programme; they gain in confidence and add value to their employers. For example, team leaders improve their skills in dealing with difficult issues with the staff that they manage. Retail apprentices apply their enhanced skills to improve processes such as day-end cost reductions. A small minority of apprentices who were employed prior to starting their programme are not developing new skills and, for these apprentices, the requirements of the apprenticeship are not being fulfilled.

Leaders have created a management structure with clear lines of accountability to evaluate the quality of training. They have a sound understanding of key strengths and weaknesses, and they are taking appropriate action to tackle aspects that require improvement. Directors and leaders monitor appropriate indicators of how staff, apprentices and employers are performing. However, their improvement plans are not sufficiently specific to allow managers to measure precisely the impact of their actions.

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**

A high proportion of apprentices acquire the workplace behaviours and skills required for their chosen careers as a result of their apprenticeship training. Apprentices understand how the knowledge and skills that they are acquiring help them in their current job. Coaches and employers ensure that apprentices undertake programmes that relate clearly to the culture, work and expectations of their companies. For example, apprentices in retail analyse why some products sell better than others in different stores and use this analysis well to improve how stock is displayed. Retail management apprentices learn different leadership styles and how to apply these

effectively within their own teams. Apprentices on funeral operations programmes learn in detail about the legal aspects relating to funerals, such as repatriation issues and how to liaise effectively with coroners.

Most coaches provide good support through regular meetings with apprentices and their employers, which enable apprentices to gain vocational knowledge, skills and behaviours. Although a few apprentices experience a slow start to their training due to late allocation of a coach, they receive effective support to catch up through more frequent visits and the use of additional online materials.

Across most of the apprenticeship programmes, coaches use a range of high-quality and interesting resources to develop apprentices' vocational knowledge and understanding of the sector in which they are employed. Apprentices use the resources well to apply the off-the-job training to their work situations. They improve their ability to reflect on the skills that they develop and accurately record the improvement in their competencies. In a small number of instances, training of apprentices in groups is not of a sufficiently high standard, with activities that are not tailored closely enough to apprentices' current level of understanding.

Leaders and managers of LDA, and employers, closely monitor the progress of apprentices as they complete the modules of their programme. Through weekly performance meetings and use of the newly developed online system, they focus on helping those apprentices making slower than expected progress through the modules. However, leaders and managers recognise that they need to identify and assess more accurately the specific skills that will enable individual apprentices to fulfil their potential.

Coaches provide helpful feedback to apprentices on the assessed written work and practical tasks that they complete as part of their programme. As a result, apprentices know how to improve the quality of their work. However, the feedback does not provide clear enough guidance about the specific skills and behaviours that apprentices need to be more successful at work.

Coaches support apprentices well to complete modules and materials in sequence and within agreed timescales. This enables apprentices to make progress in line with planned timescales. For a small number of apprentices, particularly the most able, delays in receiving materials slow their progress.

Leaders and managers ensure that employers provide apprentices with helpful information and guidance before they enrol. Consequently, most apprentices have a good understanding of how the apprenticeship will benefit their career. The provision of ongoing impartial careers advice and guidance is not routinely available to all apprentices.

Too many apprentices do not develop higher-level English and mathematics skills relevant to their job roles. Although managers find out about apprentices' existing English and mathematics qualifications when they start their apprenticeships, they do

not use this information sufficiently well to challenge apprentices to develop their skills to a higher level.

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

Leaders and managers have developed and put in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. Directors receive regular safeguarding updates from managers about safeguarding issues that apprentices experience and on matters related to health and safety. Managers take appropriate action to support apprentices with safeguarding concerns.

Managers ensure that the appropriate pre-employment checks are in place for staff and that safe recruitment policies are implemented. Staff receive regular and appropriate training on safeguarding and on the 'Prevent' duty, using online learning materials. The director of quality has produced a 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan that are fit for purpose. Apprentices working in retail in central London have a very thorough understanding of the risks of a terrorist attack and actions to take if they feel threatened.

Apprentices report that they feel safe. The vast majority know how they would report any concerns that they may have. However, too many apprentices have limited understanding of the safeguarding risks they face in their local area.

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