

Peacocks Stores Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	1276459
Name of lead inspector:	Elaine Price HMI
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Type of provider:	Employer
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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.

Peacocks Stores Limited is a fashion retailer and became part of The Edinburgh Woollen Mill Group in 2012. In May 2017, Peacocks Stores Limited became a prime contractor for levy-funded apprentices. They provide apprenticeship training for all connected companies within the group throughout England. The total number of employees within England is approximately 6,000.

Peacocks Stores provides education and training for 144 apprentices. All apprentices are following standards-based programmes. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 104 level 2 intermediate retailer, 22 level 3 retail team leader and 18 level 4 retail manager apprentices on programme. Peacocks Stores currently works with two subcontractors, Qube Learning and Northern Training Academy, who enrol apprentices and deliver functional skills. Northern Training Academy also delivers elements of the level 4 retail manager apprenticeship programme.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Senior managers have been too slow to respond to significant weaknesses that exist in the planning of apprentices' programmes and the quality of the education and training that apprentices receive. Managers have been slow to put in place end-point assessment for apprentices who have now reached the end of their programme. Managers have recently instructed an awarding organisation to provide end-point assessment; however, this has been too late for a few apprentices.

Directors and senior managers have tasked store managers to plan and deliver the apprentices' training programmes. However, they have not ensured that the staff responsible for managing and delivering apprentices' learning programmes have the required skills or knowledge to provide high-quality education and training.

Store managers' planning of the standards-based apprenticeship programmes is weak.

Store managers use their experience of working in the retail sector well to support the development of the vocational skills and knowledge of apprentices who are new to their job role. However, they do not effectively plan off-the-job training. Too many apprentices do not receive well-planned activities or are not given the time to undertake training and development away from their job and, as a result, make slow progress.

Peacocks Stores works with two subcontractor partners who enrol apprentices, deliver functional skills qualifications and elements of the level 4 retail management apprenticeship. Managers do not have in place any arrangements to monitor the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment provided to their apprentices by subcontractor partners. Managers acknowledge they need to resolve this swiftly.

Directors and senior managers have a clear focus and strategy to develop a training framework that supports their workforce in order to meet the organisation's business objectives. They have created a progression pathway for apprentices to progress from level 2 retail to level 4 retail management to develop their workforce and support succession planning for the business.

Through formal reviews and monitoring, managers have already recognised that improvements need to be made to the apprenticeship programmes such as planning learning and reviewing apprentices' progress. Managers are taking steps to rectify these weaknesses, but this is too late for the majority of apprentices who make insufficient progress on their programmes.

The board of directors have no formal reporting or oversight of the standard of education and training that apprentices receive or the progress they are making.

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

Store managers are not effective in delivering a good standard of education and training to apprentices.

Too many store managers and apprentices do not fully understand the requirements of the apprenticeship programmes such as apprentices' entitlement to off-the-job training, the development of apprentices' behaviours or ensuring that end-point assessment is in place. Managers have identified this as a weakness and very recently introduced an 'Apprenticeship Manual'. However, this is too late for the majority of apprentices who make slow progress. A set of e-learning modules, to support apprentices' development of knowledge, skills and behaviours, have been developed but these are not yet available for staff and apprentices to use.

Store managers have not designed learning programmes to meet individual apprentices' needs. Store managers do not identify apprentices' existing vocational skills and knowledge. Consequently, they do not plan an individual programme that challenges apprentices to make the progress they should. Store managers do not set milestones against which to measure the progress their apprentices are making in preparation for their end-point assessment.

Too many store managers do not effectively plan off-the-job training activities or ensure that apprentices receive sufficient time away from their job to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. Most of the work completed consists of company induction packs such as customer service, the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding and health and safety which all new staff do on joining the company. Most apprentices produce insufficient written work. When apprentices do produce written work, store managers assess it infrequently and do not provide apprentices with useful feedback that helps them to improve.

Store managers' recording and monitoring of apprentices' progress is weak. They do not set specific training and development targets so that apprentices know what they need to do next and how to make progress in a planned timescale. As a result, too many apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.

The majority of apprentices who are recruited and new to the retail sector or their job role receive good support from their store managers on-the-job. Store managers use their retail skills and knowledge well to provide apprentices with on-the-job tasks and activities that help them develop new vocational skills and knowledge of working in the retail sector. For example, level 2 apprentices gain knowledge and practical skills in retailing such as visual merchandising and customer service skills. A small minority of level 4 apprentices benefit from one-to-one sessions where they develop knowledge relevant to their workplace practice. For example, apprentices are able to calculate profit and loss and understand the difference between fixed and variable costs.

In some stores, existing staff enrol onto the apprenticeship programme with little or no guidance about the structure or content of the programme. A few apprentices on level 2 programmes, who have been in their current role for some time before joining the apprenticeship programme, do not learn sufficient new skills or knowledge. In a few stores, level 4 apprentices receive training from their store manager, who is also undertaking the level 4 apprenticeship programme.

Tutors from the Northern Training Academy assess apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics and plan individual sessions well using a diagnostic assessment tool. They provide supportive coaching to apprentices and they develop their English and mathematics skills. For example, a level 2 apprentice is able to edit text, use commas correctly and work out simple calculations.

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

Senior managers have made safeguarding a priority. The board of directors has approved the comprehensive safeguarding policy and procedures. The directors have ensured that there is a designated safeguarding manager with the appropriate level of training to carry out the role effectively. Managers have received relevant training to raise their understanding and awareness of safeguarding matters. Processes are in place for the recording of safeguarding concerns. At the time of the monitoring visit, there had been no safeguarding referrals relating to apprentices.

The majority of apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding. They know how and to whom they should report concerns. Apprentices work safely and know how to keep themselves, colleagues and their customers secure and safe.

Apprentices do not have a sufficient awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremist behaviours.

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