

FWD Training and Consultancy Limited

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 providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

Established in 2014, FWD Training and Consultancy Limited is a financial services training organisation based in Bexley, London. The provider has been delivering apprenticeship training through subcontract arrangements since 2014. It became a prime-contract holder in May 2017 and delivers apprenticeships to financial services companies paying the apprenticeship levy, in London and across the country.

There are 650 apprentices on programme. The majority of these are on level 2, 3 and 4 standards in insurance, credit management and financial services. Since their establishment, FWD Training and Consultancy have been working with a significant number of large high-profile financial services companies.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Directors and managers at FWD Training and Consultancy share a vision and ambition to provide high-quality apprenticeship training for the financial services sector. They work very closely with apprenticeship trailblazer groups to ensure that the apprenticeship standards meet the needs of employers. They work with employers to implement apprenticeship programmes that support young people in gaining the skills they need to work in the financial services sector. Leaders and managers support employers in the careful recruitment of individuals for the apprenticeship programme.

Since gaining a directly funded contract, FWD Training and Consultancy has seen a significant increase in the number of apprentices starting programmes. As a result, directors have restructured their leadership team and increased the number of coaches supporting apprentices. They have recruited coaches from the financial services sector, all of whom have considerable experience which benefits apprentices.

Directors have invested appropriately in new management information systems and an online portfolio for keeping learners' work and records of their progress. However, tutors who use the online portfolio do not do so consistently well. Directors meet regularly to monitor the performance of their managers and coaches and to check that they comply with all the requirements of the apprenticeship programme.

Leaders and managers have implemented a supportive approach to performance management. This ensures that where staff have been identified as not meeting expectations, they are supported to do so. Directors rightly acknowledge that as the provision grows, they need to strengthen their governance and are reviewing the arrangements they have in place.

Managers focus well on ensuring apprentices' entitlement to off-the-job training is met. Apprentices take part in a variety of learning activities, such as regular workshops, group sessions and one-to-one coaching. Apprentices produce a log to provide evidence of their off-the-job training. Through this, staff are able to ensure that apprentices' learning is relevant to the industry and provide a record of apprentices' continuing professional development.

Employers receive comprehensive information about their responsibilities when they recruit apprentices. Coaches work closely with apprentices' managers to link the off-the-job activities to apprentices' work. In addition, apprentices, coaches and apprentices' line managers meet together every quarter to ensure the employers' full involvement with the apprenticeship programme and to enable the apprentices to gain the skills needed to achieve the apprenticeship.

Directors have a clear oversight of the delivery of mathematics and English functional skills qualifications, but they do not have a comprehensive approach to the development of these skills beyond the minimum requirements of the apprenticeship. Apprentices speak about how they have improved their written and spoken communication skills. In a few progress reviews, apprentices show how they have used appropriate English and mathematics while at work. A few coaches find suitable opportunities to encourage the development of apprentices' English, mathematics and information technology skills. Apprentices do this, for example, through professional presentations and their written records of evidence against skills.

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

The majority of apprentices are highly motivated, enjoy their apprenticeship and develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to their job roles. For example, an apprentice on the insurance standard had the opportunity to visit 'the box' at a leading insurance company and see first-hand underwriters at work in the city. One coach worked effectively with a business administration apprentice to develop the spreadsheet skills needed to draw up a budget proposal for a project he is overseeing. Another coach supported an apprentice successfully to gain confidence with presentation skills.

Apprentices have regular contact with their coaches through effective progress reviews and assessments. Coaches plan and arrange extra support and one-to-one sessions when apprentices fall behind or miss sessions. As a result, the majority of apprentices make the progress expected of them.

Coaches are well qualified and experienced in the specialist subject areas they teach. The majority use the assessment of apprentices' prior skills, knowledge and job roles appropriately to ensure apprentices complete learning and work that is new and relevant, and that supports them to prepare for their next steps.

The quality of information that apprentices receive about their work, in their progress reviews and in their targets, is not consistently high across all subject areas and among all coaches. In too many instances, coaches set apprentices targets that focus on the completion of tasks or units, rather than on the development of skills. These include statements such as 'study for your exam', or 'continue to finalise your portfolio'. Consequently, apprentices do not always know the steps that they need to take to gain the knowledge they need to make the progress of which they are capable.

In the teaching sessions observed on the monitoring visit, coaches linked well the classroom activity to work practices. For example, in insurance, apprentices developed their knowledge of risk-transfer mechanisms and what is insurable and uninsurable, based on their own work context. In another session, the coach asked apprentices to reflect on the merits of a recent incident where an organisation sacked employees for producing novelty mugs. Apprentices were able to understand both sides of the argument, and why the sanctions taken were appropriate. In a minority of sessions, coaches' strategies for checking apprentices' understanding were not sufficient. It was not clear if apprentices understood the topic.

Apprentices have a good understanding of the expectations of them to generate evidence against the apprenticeship standard. Coaches expect apprentices to take responsibility for the management of their own time in order to produce work which is of a good quality. They encourage apprentices to produce a wide range of evidence as they progress towards their end-point assessment. However, not enough apprentices are fully conversant with the requirement and expectations of the end-point assessment.

Apprentices benefit from good information about the apprenticeship prior to being accepted on the programme. For example, leaders and managers use current apprentices to return to their former schools to promote the benefits of apprenticeships. This helps to ensure that they recruit apprentices to the correct course so that they stand the best chance of successfully completing and benefiting from the programme. Coaches use their extensive experience within the financial services sector to provide effective guidance to apprentices about longer-term career options. Apprentices learn how the knowledge, skills, experience and qualifications they gain will improve their career aspirations.

Directors, in their evaluation of the quality of provision, correctly identify areas for improvement, such as the need for stronger governance, for more robust quality monitoring and to increase the number of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship. The resulting plans to make these improvements contain clear steps on how and when directors will achieve them.

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

Managers and coaches establish a culture of safeguarding and apprentices understand well how to keep themselves safe. Apprentices receive appropriate safeguarding training at induction, during discussions at progress reviews and by completing compulsory online courses.

Directors and all staff attend regular safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training and the designated safeguarding lead has enrolled on training later in the summer related to his role. The designated safeguarding lead records all incidents, of which there have been few, on a central register which directors review regularly. However, the register provides insufficient detail to enable leaders and managers to monitor trends and take the appropriate preventative steps. The designated safeguarding lead has established effective links with local safeguarding groups.

Safer recruitment practices are in place and managers have checked that all staff are safe to work with their apprentices. The safeguarding policies and procedures are appropriate, having clear lines of responsibility and reporting.

Managers support coaches well to integrate safeguarding, British values and the threats associated with radicalisation and extremism into their delivery of training and their discussions with apprentices at progress reviews. Coaches feel confident and able to use current and local incidents to generate discussion with apprentices, who talk confidently about how important it is that they understand the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in the context of their work.

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