

Buttercups Training 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 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.

Buttercups Training Limited (Buttercups) was awarded a direct contract to provide apprenticeships in May 2017. Previously, for several years it had provided apprenticeships through subcontracting arrangements with further education colleges. All of its apprentices follow apprenticeship-framework programmes at intermediate and advanced levels in health (pharmacy services). Buttercups works with employers that range from independent pharmacies to large well-known national chains. At the time of the visit, it had 344 apprentices. Buttercups does not use subcontractors for any of its apprenticeship work.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have established a programme of apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3 in health (pharmacy services) as their core business. Staff have extensive specialist expertise in this vocational area. Leaders are beginning to explore management apprenticeships for pharmacy staff and, in response to requests from employers, they are evaluating the feasibility of providing apprenticeships for dental nurses. They are approaching these initiatives with caution to ensure that any diversification does not affect the quality of any of the programmes. Leaders and managers enjoy very strong relationships with employers and representative bodies in the pharmacy sector. They are closely involved in the development of new standards for apprenticeships in this sector. As a result, they are in a strong position to introduce these new programmes successfully once they become available.

Programmes meet in full the requirements of apprenticeships. Staff conduct a thorough analysis of each apprentice's job. These analyses show that most apprentices work in appropriate roles that provide them with good opportunities to develop the full range of knowledge, skills and understanding that they require for their qualifications. Where this is not the case, staff make appropriate arrangements for apprentices to undertake placements that allow them to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need. The duration of programmes is extended for the small number of apprentices who work less than 30 hours a week. However,

although staff take existing qualifications into account when planning programmes for apprentices, they do not undertake a detailed analysis of apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and understanding, for which they do not hold qualifications. Managers are currently developing new processes to address this weakness.

Apprentices are either new to their roles or have worked with their employer to map out a clear career-progression route in which completion of the apprenticeship is an integral part. All apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and understanding. They follow apprenticeship frameworks in which the theoretical (off-the-job) and practical (on-the-job) aspects of learning are clearly defined. Employers provide appropriate time at work for apprentices to undertake their studies, and most apprentices also complete work in their own time using Buttercups's online learning resources. Staff provide appropriate support to apprentices who need to gain qualifications in English and mathematics to complete their full framework. A high proportion of apprentices pass examinations in these subjects at their first attempt.

Employers are closely involved in the delivery of apprentices' programmes. Apprentices' supervisors become expert witnesses and help to assess the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) elements of programmes. They also take the role of workplace mentor and they support apprentices to develop their practical skills. In most cases, this arrangement is successful but one supervisor expressed concern that she did not understand fully the requirements of her role. Apprentices' supervisors are closely involved in reviewing and monitoring apprentices' progress, and those interviewed understand how well their apprentice is doing.

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

Apprentices receive a good standard of on- and off-the-job training. Tutors and assessors are very well qualified and relate training skilfully to the workplace experiences of apprentices. Consequently, apprentices produce course work and evidence of competence that are of an appropriate standard. Most apprentices complete tasks by the agreed deadlines.

Apprentices can readily identify the new knowledge, skills and understanding that they have developed as a result of their training. For example, apprentices described how they had enhanced their competence in adhering to standard operating procedures related to stock control and had become able to deal with customers' enquiries about malaria prophylaxis prior to travelling abroad.

Apprentices have access to, and make effective use of, good-quality online learning resources that support their development. The resources at level 2 are particularly good. All apprentices receive regular and effective training and pastoral support from tutors and assessors. In addition to scheduled contact with staff, they can use a

telephone helpline that provides an out-of-hours service. These arrangements allow apprentices to study at a time and place of their choosing, which they value highly.

Apprentices receive very thorough and regular assessment of their submitted work. Feedback from assessors is appropriately detailed and helpful. This ensures that apprentices have a clear understanding of what further improvements they must make and by when. Staff use a good range of assessment methods to check apprentices' competence. In particular, reflective practice is used very effectively to help apprentices analyse their actions and identify how to improve.

Apprentices make good use of their electronic portfolio to submit completed work, receive feedback and monitor their success. Staff maintain detailed records of apprentices' performance. They make very good use of this information to provide thorough reviews of progress that help to motivate apprentices. Staff identify where improvements are necessary, and through close cooperation with employers and apprentices, they negotiate appropriate actions to address performance shortfalls quickly. Apprentices have a good appreciation of their own development. However, too often progress reviews pay little attention to apprentices' personal and social development.

Apprentices have a clear understanding of why they are undertaking their programme and its contribution to their career aspirations. However, managers recognise that apprentices do not receive sufficient independent careers information, advice and guidance throughout their programmes. Consequently, not all apprentices have a broad appreciation of the wider opportunities available to them. Managers' improvement actions to address this weakness are at an early stage and it is too soon to judge their impact.

Quality monitoring processes are successful in raising standards. Managers make good use of apprentices' feedback to improve the quality of training resources. Managers use direct observation of teaching, learning and assessment effectively to inform improvement planning. However, they do not link lesson observations closely enough to staff appraisal to address weaknesses in the practices of individual members of staff.

Tutors make adequate use of the initial assessment of apprentices' English and mathematical knowledge and skills to plan their learning programmes. They provide appropriate support that helps apprentices to achieve relevant qualifications. Tutors work closely with apprentices and employers so that they understand the importance of developing good English and mathematical knowledge and skills.

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

Leaders and managers have established an effective culture of safeguarding. As a result, apprentices are safe in their workplaces and know to whom they should report any concerns.

All new staff undertake initial safeguarding training that includes the 'Prevent' duty. They receive regular updates that ensure that they understand their responsibilities. Managers have developed appropriate safeguarding policies, and these help staff to understand, for example, the signs and symptoms of different types of abuse and neglect, how to deal with and record disclosures by apprentices, and how to report concerns. There is a clear staff code of conduct that includes guidance on the use of social media.

On the rare occasions when safeguarding concerns arise, staff take appropriate action. Managers record carefully the concerns raised, the actions staff take, and their outcomes. In the cases sampled, actions were appropriate and proportional.

Managers adhere to appropriate processes for checking the backgrounds of new staff. In most cases, records are clear and detailed. However, managers have not retained copies of professional qualifications for a small number of staff and, in a few cases, they have accepted oral, rather than written, employment references.

Apprentices receive guidance and training on relevant safeguarding topics, including those related to extremism and radicalisation, at the start of their programmes through online learning courses. However, while all apprentices can remember completing this work, their recall of topics is limited. Staff do not revisit these themes frequently enough to ensure that apprentices commit them to their long-term memory and can recall them easily. Although apprentices complete online courses in British values, staff lack the confidence and knowledge to bring these topics to life through learning activities. Consequently, apprentices' understanding of British values is limited.

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