

# Utilities Academy Limited

Monitoring visit report

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| <b>Unique reference number:</b> | 1276534  |
| <b>Name of lead inspector:</b>  | Paul Cocker HMI                                    |
| <b>Inspection date(s):</b>      | 17–18 July 2018                                    |
| <b>Type of provider:</b>        | Independent learning provider                      |
| <b>Address:</b>                 | Swan Mill<br>Higher Swan Lane<br>Bolton<br>BL3 3AQ |

# 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.

The Utilities Academy Limited has been delivering the dual-fuel smart-meter installer apprenticeship standard since May 2017. It has recently invested in a custom-built training facility located in Bolton. There are currently 96 apprentices working towards the standard, who are located across the country. All apprentices attend the training centre for 19 weeks at the start of the course to gain their licence to work in the electrical and gas aspects of the smart meter installation. This is followed by site visits by field assessors to support apprentices to develop their skills further and prepare for their end-point assessment. The length of programme is approximately 14 months, which has resulted in no apprentices yet reaching the gateway and completing the end-point assessment as it is too soon. Most employers' apprentices are employed directly with the organisation they work for, with the exception of one group of apprentices who are employed by an outsourcing company and then subcontracted to a very large employer.

## Themes

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

### Reasonable progress

Senior managers have a clear vision to provide high-quality apprenticeship training to the utilities sector while ensuring that the apprenticeship has a positive effect on the apprentices' social mobility. Apprentices are recruited with integrity through a rigorous recruitment and selections process, with almost all starting the apprenticeship with no prior experience of gas, electrical or smart meter installation. Apprentices develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours and use these skills in the workplace to the benefit of their employers and their customers.

Senior managers provide excellent learning resources and facilities. These include large electricity and gas workshops, classrooms and assessment rooms, a very good range of gas appliances, and a custom-built street with eight homes. Tutors make good use of these resources to enable apprentices to develop their vocational knowledge and skills in surroundings that resemble the settings they will encounter in the real world.

Senior managers ensure that apprentices receive a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the requirements of their job role and the apprenticeship standard. Leaders and managers ensure that the principles and requirements of the apprenticeship are met. They ensure that apprentices receive an in-depth induction and good-quality on- and off-the-job training. This assists apprentices in acquiring substantial new skills to safely and competently install smart meters in residential premises throughout the United Kingdom.

Senior managers have nurtured very effective relationships with employers to ensure that apprentices receive the most up-to-date technical and regulatory training. They are very responsive to employers' requests for additional knowledge and skills to be included in the programme, to meet their specific business needs. Employers' technical training representatives attend meetings at the training facilities every month to not only discuss the progress their apprentices are making but to standardise the quality of their work and develop the curriculum further for future apprentices. For example, the curriculum has recently been refined to include bespoke handheld terminal training and secure open port on cut-out and meter blocks to meet organisational and regulatory requirements.

Senior managers have worked hard to provide development opportunities for tutors to develop their teaching skills further to complement the extensive industrial experience they possess. They have received technical training on new smart meter technology (SMET2), mandatory training on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and counterterrorism training provided by the local constabulary. Despite this extensive training, many tutors need further development to hone their teaching and training skills to ensure that learning meets the differing needs of apprentices to enable them to make the progress of which they are capable.

Senior managers have not yet recruited a supervisory body to hold senior managers to account for the strategic and operational management of the provider. They are currently in the process of recruiting a supervisory body comprising employers and further education professionals. They are using recently published guidance from a further education sector body to construct the articles of memorandum which the supervisory body will work towards.

Senior managers do not yet have sufficient oversight of the progress that all apprentices make on their apprenticeships. They hold weekly progress meetings for apprentices that identify that most apprentices are achieving their milestone targets, such as the completion of their Gas Safe and Meter Operators Code of Practice Agreement (MOCO PA) standards. However, senior managers rightly acknowledge that they cannot readily identify what progress apprentices are making from their starting points and to what extent they are performing above the minimum standards of the apprenticeship. Managers are currently in the process of implementing an e-portfolio to monitor the skills, knowledge and behaviours more meticulously which will support them in informing senior managers and the supervisory body about the progress that apprentices make on their programmes.

**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**

Tutors and assessors provide relevant training in dual-fuel smart-meter installation at level 2. Apprentices acquire the vocational knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be efficient installers of smart meters. Apprentices who complete the programme gain the dual-fuel smart-meter standard at level 2, which they and their employers value highly. As part of their apprenticeship, they also gain licences to work in the electricity and gas industries, which include MOCOPA and registration on the Gas Safe register.

Tutors and assessors have good industrial experience and highly relevant technical skills. They are enthusiastic about smart-meter engineering and are keen to help apprentices to develop the required competencies for a successful and rewarding career in the energy sector.

Tutors do not plan learning sufficiently well to meet the needs of all apprentices, particularly those who develop skills more quickly than their peers. Apprentices who are making better than expected progress in the training centre do not receive challenge to complete work to a higher standard. Tutors place a disproportionate focus on the completion of modules within the course as opposed to setting apprentices specific actions that will allow them to develop rapidly the skills, knowledge and behaviours that will make them more productive in the workplace. For example, progress reviews contain very few actions in relation to developing personal and social skills, which have high importance in this customer-facing job role.

Apprentices take pride in their work. Many apprentices produce work of a good or better standard. They are very knowledgeable about healthy and safe working practices and regulations relating to dual-fuel smart-meter installation. They become adept at exchanging gas meters and selecting the most appropriate tools to use to ensure that the installation is efficient and safe.

Apprentices' progress is reviewed regularly by tutors, field-based assessors and employers. Employers take a keen interest in apprentices' progress, and their involvement in the review process is good. Apprentices lack an awareness of the importance of promoting equality and celebrating diversity and how they relate to their work as smart-meter installer.

Tutors and assessors do not place sufficient priority on developing apprentices' English, and to a lesser extent mathematical, knowledge and skills in theory lessons. They do not ensure that apprentices' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are identified and corrected in method statements completed as part of the apprenticeship. Tutors do not use the results of assessments completed at the start of the programme to plan learning for apprentices. This results in many apprentices

attending classes and learning skills that they have already mastered rather than spending their time concentrating on the skills they need to learn.

Leaders and managers have introduced an electronic-portfolio system to streamline the collection and assembly of relevant evidence. However, tutors and assessors are not yet sufficiently familiar with the system to be able to use it competently and to exploit its potential.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Leaders and managers make safeguarding a priority for apprentices. Managers have created useful safeguarding policies and procedures, which include the 'Prevent' duty, that staff understand. Staff benefit from regular training in safeguarding and 'Prevent' to update their knowledge, understanding and behaviours. However, within these policies and procedures, the guidelines on the referral of any concerns in relation to safeguarding and 'Prevent' require further development.

Managers have not had to investigate any safeguarding incidents, so their systems are yet to be tested. Managers intend to seek the advice of external agencies, such as the local authority designated officer, when needed. The senior designated safeguarding officer has completed basic training for his role and draws on his previous experience as a police officer and as a teacher in further education.

Managers ensure that there are effective recruitment practices in place. They check staff references and their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom. Managers do not currently check if staff have any previous convictions, as all apprentices are aged over 19 and employed. All apprentices have completed a Disclosure and Barring Service check through their employer.

Apprentices feel safe and are safe. They follow a rigorous induction programme and have access to a helpful handbook which provides information on safeguarding, including bullying and harassment in the workplace. Consequently, they know to whom they should report any incidents that make them feel unsafe.

Managers and staff place a very high priority on ensuring that apprentices work safely and comply with the gas and electric industry safety standards. Apprentices have a particularly good understanding of the need for rigorous safety risk assessment and checks when installing smart meters in people's homes. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of the regulations for gas and electricity and understand the factors that would make it unsafe. For example, apprentices identify electrical components that are non-compliant and report them to the national grid to be rectified by appropriately qualified engineers.

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