

Firebrand Training Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1278573

Name of lead inspector: Jules Steele HMI

Inspection date(s): 1–2 August 2018

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: The Willows
Great North Road
Wyboston
Bedford
MK44 3AL



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.

Firebrand Training Limited (Firebrand) was established in 2002 as a commercial provider of bespoke digital training, including project management and cyber security. It is the largest provider of information technology (IT) vendor qualifications in Europe. Firebrand has been providing apprenticeships through subcontracting arrangements to the digital industry since 2012. Based in London and Bedfordshire, it became a prime-contract holder in May 2017. It now provides apprenticeships nationally under the new levy funding arrangements, and has 180 apprentices currently on apprenticeship programmes. Most are working towards standards in network engineering and software development at levels 3 and 4.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and managers share a clear vision and determination to provide the highest quality of apprenticeship training for the digital industry. They work closely and effectively with the apprenticeship trailblazer group for the digital industry to ensure that the apprenticeship standards they provide meet the needs of a broad range of employers. Leaders' and managers' intention to increase the number of apprentices recruited is based firmly on the good relationships they have established with their employer partners. It is also the result of the valued contribution they make to employers' training and recruitment plans.

Since gaining a directly funded contract, senior leaders have ensured that they have a suitable management structure in place, and sufficient assessors to meet the growth in apprenticeship numbers.

Managers have designed training to focus specifically on ensuring that apprentices develop the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to meet the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. Leaders and managers provide effective help to employers and ensure that they recruit apprentices appropriately and with integrity.

Governance arrangements are appropriate and promote high expectations and ambitions for apprentices. Senior leaders and their managers are held to account by the non-executive board and are expected to secure high-quality training. The board demands frequent detailed reporting on a broad range of key accountabilities including financial health, staff performance, apprentices' outcomes and the quality of learning.

Managers pay insufficient attention to ensuring that the learning apprentices undertake at work links sufficiently to the training they receive when attending the training centre. Assessors do not make effective use of the information available on individual apprentices' starting points when they compile individual training plans. Training staff are not informed sufficiently about the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices develop at work or the individual requirements of their job role to ensure that they plan training sessions appropriately.

Employers, apprentices and staff have a good understanding of apprentices' entitlement to off-the-job training as an important element of their learning. Managers ensure that employers and workplace mentors receive comprehensive information about their roles and responsibilities for learning when apprentices commence their programme. Assessors monitor closely the individual training that apprentices receive at work and ensure that it links fully to their qualification.

Leaders and managers have established a comprehensive range of quality assurance measures to monitor the progress that individual apprentices make towards preparing for their end-point assessment. Senior leaders meet frequently with managers and assessors to check that they comply fully with all the requirements of the apprenticeship programme.

Managers make good use of an online portfolio and tracking system to monitor how effectively assessors record and track apprentices' progress. A small minority of assessors do not record apprentices' progress, and the knowledge and skills they develop, appropriately.

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

Highly motivated apprentices have a very clear understanding of the requirements of the standards and almost all remain in learning. Most make the expected progress in completing the various elements of their qualification. They become highly valued by their employers and co-workers. Apprentices and their employers can articulate fully the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they are developing. For example, apprentices working for a major transportation company through their project management have improved the IT functionality of the company's public 'journey planner' to combine passenger rail- and bus-fare tickets. Passengers can now

establish quickly the best route at a fare most appropriate to their budget. In infrastructure technician roles, apprentices working on IT help desks and in technical support develop successfully their confidence in investigating and solving customers' queries. They learn quickly how to follow up technical issues and eliminate software malfunctions.

In the small proportion of training observed, trainers were knowledgeable and linked the training effectively to real-life scenarios. Trainers set tasks that challenged apprentices to reflect on their prior learning and their technical knowledge. Apprentices learned to trouble shoot security events and incidents and suggest a suitable remedy. Most apprentices demonstrated a good command and understanding of how to identify and mitigate security risks. They were highly motivated to complete their tasks.

Managers ensure that good transition arrangements are in place for apprentices as they join employers' workforces. Much time is spent enabling apprentices to understand fully the requirements of an apprenticeship and to help them settle into the workplace quickly. Assessors coach workplace mentors to help them to provide good help and guidance to apprentices on the requirements of the job. Workplace mentors help apprentices to balance the considerable amount of studying required to compete the apprenticeship successfully with the challenges of a full-time job and a demanding role.

Assessors review the work of apprentices carefully. Most apprentices make expected progress. Assessors' good subject knowledge and broad experience in the digital industry enable them to provide good technical help and guidance to apprentices.

Apprentices benefit from extensive pre-programme information, advice and guidance that enable them to choose the qualification best suited to their job role. Apprentices also benefit greatly from the opportunities provided by Firebrand to choose additional, industry-specific qualifications from the extensive range available through their commercial business.

Managers do not focus closely enough on providing effective ongoing careers information, advice and guidance. Most apprentices have a limited understanding of the routes they can take and the opportunities available to them once they complete their apprenticeship. Apprentices meet colleagues more established in their careers while studying at the training centre, but this does not provide them with sufficient insight into a rapidly changing industry.

Trainers and assessors do not focus sufficiently on enabling apprentices to develop their English skills. They do not encourage apprentices to demonstrate their ability to communicate orally and in writing at a high level. Many apprentices are not developing the strong interpersonal skills and cultural awareness they need to pass their end-point assessment and to deal with customers and clients successfully. A small proportion of apprentices work successfully towards completing their functional

skills qualifications in English and mathematics. Managers do not currently evaluate whether most apprentices succeed on their first attempt at passing the examinations.

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

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and managers have ensured that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves, their peers and their clients safe at work, at home and online. They know to whom they should take any concerns and understand thoroughly the rule of law that applies to internet safety. Many have a detailed understanding of the potential for cyber crime and what steps they must take to prevent it. Learners are safe, both at training centres and in the workplace.

Managers have established a comprehensive approach to safeguarding apprentices. Safeguarding referrals are effective and staff are trained to respond appropriately. The very few referrals documented have been managed correctly. The designated safeguarding lead is suitably trained and has ensured that all staff and directors are trained. Managers do not yet report safeguarding formally to the board. Senior leaders and managers carry out safe recruitment procedures when employing staff. Managers keep appropriate records of the suitability of staff who work with apprentices.

Managers ensure that apprentices undertake comprehensive training on all aspects of the 'Prevent' duty. Staff and apprentices are confident and able to discuss British values. They know how to live confidently in modern Britain. Leaders and managers have yet to ensure that they have a comprehensive 'Prevent' duty risk assessment in place and a suitable action plan to mitigate identified risks.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018