

Fuel Learning Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1276450

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Inspection date(s): 1–2 August 2018

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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.

Fuel Learning Limited (Fuel) is a privately-owned training company established in March 2009 to provide executive coaching and leadership services to its corporate and commercial clients. In March 2017, the company was successful in joining the register of apprenticeship training providers (RoATP). The company offers standards-based apprenticeships at level 3 in team leading and at level 5 in operations management. Apprentices are employed in the logistics, retail, building distribution, packaging and utilities sectors across England. At the time of the monitoring visit, the company had 270 apprentices in learning, of which 223 were studying at level 3 and the remainder were studying at level 5.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Company directors have a clear strategic vision for the business and articulate this very effectively in their plans to provide high-quality apprenticeships to levy-paying employers. Leaders and managers at Fuel work cohesively to meet the high expectations that employers have for their apprenticeship programmes.

While directors and leaders have a good understanding of the overall financial performance of their business, the absence of a formalised business plan linked to challenging key performance indicators limits their oversight of the apprenticeship programme. For example, while all staff have clear job descriptions, most staff do not have individualised performance targets against which either they or their managers can evaluate and review their individual contributions.

Following the company's successful inclusion on to the RoATP, leaders have skilfully utilised their expertise to develop and implement an effective framework to train apprentices. Directors quickly prioritised investment in the recruitment of a dedicated apprenticeship management and delivery team; as a result, staffing levels have increased rapidly to meet the expanding needs of the apprenticeship programme.

Staff, most of whom are new to their role, are suitably qualified and have substantial industry experience aligned to their individual roles. They benefit from relevant

continuous professional development to help consolidate their skills and expertise in delivering the new apprenticeship standards. Leaders and managers have given high priority to establish a team of functional skills specialists to support the small minority of apprentices who join the programme without prior qualifications in English and/or mathematics.

Company directors and managers work proactively with employers in the shaping and delivery of the apprenticeship programmes to meet the needs of each business. For example, they ensure that apprenticeship facilitators incorporate employers' own internal documentation, operational terminology and procedures to exemplify and consolidate apprentices' knowledge and understanding. In addition, leaders have worked closely with their end-point assessment organisation to ensure that the curriculum supports apprentices to acquire the required skills and behaviours.

Leaders' analysis and use of data is good. Managers produce regular achievement reports to identify performance differences and trends between different groups of apprentices and by employer. Leaders and managers monitor how each apprentice is progressing well. While relatively new, this allows managers and training facilitators to plan timely interventions to support apprentices who may be starting to fall behind with their studies.

Leaders and managers have started to develop and implement appropriate quality assurance procedures to monitor and drive improvement in teaching, learning and assessment. Managers routinely evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by observing lessons and identify appropriate improvement actions. This enables facilitators to receive targeted support to improve their delivery skills. However, the records made by observers focus too much on the skills and practices demonstrated by facilitators and do not concentrate sufficiently on what apprentices have learned, both in lessons and in their learning over time.

Leaders make relevant use of self-assessment to review carefully the quality of the provision. However, while managers are clear about what actions they need to take to improve the standard of provision further, the associated improvement plan does not set out in sufficient detail the planned actions or timescales. For example, self-assessment accurately identifies the need to develop effective governance arrangements and sets out a number of well-considered action points. However, the plan lacks challenging timescales and impact measures as to how governance will improve the quality of provision.

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 benefit from regular and well-planned off-the-job training in order to develop and hone their vocational skills and knowledge. Facilitators plan an appropriate range of activities to keep apprentices interested and on task. They help apprentices to link theory with practice by providing feedback that is informative,

deepens their understanding and helps them to improve their vocational skills. Apprentices make effective use of the online learning environment, e-portfolios and a video library to continue learning outside of the classroom. As a result, apprentices are well motivated, enjoy their learning and the large majority make secure progress in their learning.

Facilitators set demanding work projects which motivate apprentices to produce work of a high standard. For example, apprentices in team leading use their knowledge of 'Gantt charts' and stakeholder relationships to set up successful charity fundraising projects. Most apprentices have a secure understanding of the requirements of the end-point assessment and a large majority achieve distinction grades in their vocational qualification. However, a small minority of apprentices report that they do not have sufficient time during very busy work periods or when they move between departments to complete extended assignments in the workplace.

Facilitators accurately assess the individual starting points of apprentices. Assessments include English and mathematics, their vocational skills and identify any additional support that may help them cope with the rigour and demands of the programme. However, they do not consistently use results from initial assessment to plan and set challenging targets that help apprentices extend their understanding in these essential skills.

Managers and facilitators work closely with employers to develop helpful and informative training and assessment plans that take account of the apprentices' specific job roles. For example, embedding the business values and terminology commonly used within the employers' organisation to enhance and extend apprentices confidence in using such terms. However, facilitators do not use this information sufficiently in the development of individualised learning targets or activities. Targets focus on tasks that need to be completed and do not always record in sufficient detail the development of apprentices' skills or behaviours over time.

Careers information, advice and guidance, is helpful and informative. Apprentices, at the start of the course, receive a detailed briefing on the requirements of the apprenticeship. Managers place apprentices on appropriate courses given their qualifications, experience and job role. Apprentices have a secure understanding of how the apprenticeship links to their career ambitions. As a result, apprentices' attendance and retention are both high.

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

Leaders and managers have ensured that appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures are in place and take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. As a result, safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

The designated safeguarding lead, who is also a senior manager within the organisation, is appropriately qualified and trained to undertaking this key role. Managers have established suitable links with local professionals and support services to enable them to make appropriate referrals should the need arise.

Leaders and managers follow safe recruitment practices by carry out suitable pre-employment checks on all newly appointed staff. In addition, managers have undertaken Disclosure and Barring Service checks for relevant existing staff. Managers have ensured that all members of staff complete regular training to refresh their understanding of safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values.

Leaders have implemented the 'Prevent' duty effectively. An informative 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan details how the company is responding to local vulnerabilities and threats that may pose a risk to apprentices. All staff have completed an online training programme. They understand how to identify apprentices at risk of radicalisation and extremism, and what to do should a concern arise. Apprentices have also completed online 'Prevent' training. They receive helpful information about British values during their induction and during their programme.

Apprentices say that they feel safe. Induction and continuing learning and development activities place significant emphasis on developing and extending apprentices' awareness of the importance of safeguarding. Facilitators ensure that apprentices know how to keep themselves safe online and when using social media by skilfully integrating this into their lessons. In the workplace, apprentices demonstrate safe working practices, for example by closely adhering to site-specific operating procedures, and in being vigilant and promptly reporting any near misses, trips and hazards. However, safeguarding information in course handbooks and on the company's website does not identify the designated officer post. As a result, most apprentices do not know who the designated safeguarding officer is or how to contact them.

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