

Entrust Support Services Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Victor Reid HMI

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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.

Entrust Support Services Limited (Entrust) is a joint-venture company. It was set up in April 2013 between Capita Plc and Staffordshire County Council to deliver contracted shared services including apprenticeships to a range of public-sector employers. In May 2017, Entrust was successful in joining the register of apprenticeship training providers. At the time of the monitoring visit, the company had 137 apprentices in training. Fifty-two apprentices were working towards recently developed standards-based apprenticeships at levels 3, 4 and 5. These are mainly in supervisory management and leadership. The remaining 85 apprentices were studying for apprenticeship-framework qualifications at levels 2 and 3 in business administration, children's care learning and development, supporting teaching and learning in schools, and information technology.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Governance and oversight of the apprenticeship programme by Entrust's operational board is insufficiently thorough. Directors meet monthly and receive regular operational-performance reports from the various heads of service responsible for key business units including apprenticeships. However, the information that is presented to them focuses almost entirely on contractual compliance, and financial and business-development matters. Too few of the performance indicators set by the board for the apprenticeship programme relate to quality and standards. Directors have not set any performance targets relating to their expectation that all apprentices will benefit from high-quality teaching, learning and assessment.

Leaders' oversight of the apprenticeship programme is neither robust nor challenging. At an operational level, the chief operating officer meets weekly with heads of service and delivery staff responsible for the apprenticeship programmes. While there is good attendance, the meetings focus almost exclusively on programme delivery and contractual compliance. In addition, discussion of and actions arising from these and the associated monthly business-review meetings are not always formally recorded. The focus on reviewing apprentices' progress and the quality of apprentices' learning experiences is insufficient.

Leaders' strategic planning for the apprenticeship programme requires improvement. The apprenticeship strategic plan does not set out clearly how leaders and managers are responding to regional skills priorities. For example, the plan contains no meaningful evaluation to show how current and planned apprenticeship priorities align with those of the Stoke and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership or the skills priorities of the West Midlands Combined Authority. In addition, none of the priorities set out in the apprenticeship strategic plan specifically focuses on quality and standards of delivery for the apprenticeship programme.

In contrast, the joint venture board has established a well-informed multi-year strategic business plan that provides a clear focus for Entrust and for measuring its growth against a shared vision and a set of contracted-service commitments. Directors on the operational board use their knowledge and experience of the public sector effectively to shape the range of contracted services provided to a range of clients.

Managers do not monitor or report on all aspects of apprenticeship performance and quality. While a quality-assurance report is presented routinely and reviewed at various leadership meetings including the monthly operational board, discussion of the report's content and any resulting actions are not recorded formally. Where quality-monitoring activities have been undertaken, the focus is predominantly on contractual aspects and whether activities are taking place rather than whether they are meeting leaders' and managers' expectations. For example, while managers report routinely on the recruitment of apprentices, they do not collect information regularly about the provision of, take-up and impact of additional learning support to ensure that apprentices receive the support they require to help them to progress swiftly and achieve highly.

Leaders' evaluation of the apprenticeship provision is not sufficiently self-critical, the draft self-assessment report does not provide leaders with a clear picture of the quality of the provision. For example, targets set for ensuring that all apprenticeship programmes are of a high standard are insufficiently specific. The actions to ensure that they are achieved are not sufficiently challenging. In addition, few apprenticeship staff have contributed to the self-assessment process and the views of apprentices and employers are not reflected sufficiently in the report.

Leaders' plans for improving the provision are detailed. They set out clear and specific targets that allow them to monitor identified improvements. However, other required improvements have not been included in the draft quality-improvement plan (QIP). For example, the QIP does not set out any specific actions to strengthen arrangements for observing teaching, learning and assessment against demanding performance indicators.

Leaders communicate their ambition for Entrust successfully to staff at all levels. The recently appointed chief executive has prioritised resources and investment to support both the company's strategic direction and the newly restructured apprenticeship team. As a result, apprenticeship staffing levels have now increased

significantly and workloads are managed actively. Programme leaders and personal development coaches (coaches) have sufficient time to support allocated apprentices. Staff at all levels are clear about their individual responsibilities and priorities. Internal communication supports a culture that is open and inclusive.

Strategic and operational management of subcontractors is strong. Leaders use vetting procedures that are rigorous and demanding when selecting external subcontractors. Managers hold review meetings regularly with subcontractors to ensure that contractual requirements are met and that apprentices make good progress. Records of the contract-review meetings are detailed. Managers make good use of data to monitor closely the quality of the subcontracted provision.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Insufficient progress

Managers' planning for the standards-based apprenticeships is not good for all programmes. On standards-based apprenticeships in leadership and management, planning is very informative and detailed. Managers have developed key-assessment milestones that provide apprentices with concise and detailed information, setting out precisely the training to be delivered at all stages. Apprentices use this information appropriately to prepare for learning. As a result, they quickly demonstrate good knowledge and skills in their assignment work and make good progress. However, planning for the standards-based apprenticeship in business administration is weak. Managers have been slow to develop the course and key-assessment points are poorly defined. As a result, these apprentices are not clear about their progress.

Coaches provide effective support. This enables the large majority of apprentices to keep on track and to meet the criteria in framework-based apprenticeships. However, too many standards-based apprentices do not have a secure understanding of the requirements of the end-point assessment or the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to achieve the highest grades in their vocational qualification.

Programme leaders monitor effectively the progress that individual apprentices make in developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They implement appropriate actions to support apprentices who are at risk of not achieving their qualifications. However, programme leaders do not produce reports from which heads of service and directors can identify easily the progress that all apprentices make. This reduces the extent to which leaders and managers can scrutinise and challenge.

Coaches set appropriate work for apprentices on a regular basis. In most cases they provide helpful feedback to enable apprentices to reflect on and improve the standard of their work. Most apprentices produce work of a good standard. For example, in team leading at level 3 apprentices use their knowledge of recent

changes in legislation to adapt their individual approach to the collection and use of sensitive data in the workplace. Similarly, apprentices in operations management at level 5 use their knowledge and understanding of different management styles skilfully to improve how they manage and lead their teams. However, in a significant minority of cases coaches focus too much on unit completion and evidence collection.

Managers assess the starting points of the large majority of apprentices accurately in English and mathematics as well as in their vocational subjects. However, managers do not ensure that all apprentices who need to achieve their functional-skills qualifications receive swift and sufficient support. In addition, managers do not have an effective strategy to develop English and mathematics for those apprentices who already have achieved GCSEs in these subjects. Leaders and managers have not developed a clear policy to support apprentices with additional learning-support needs.

Managers place apprentices on suitable programmes. They consider their experience, job role and qualifications carefully before placing them. All apprentices participate in and record their off-the-job training accurately. Programme leaders and coaches ensure that the apprentices' workplace managers are informed about the progress of their apprentices. Workplace managers' attendance at planned workplace progress reviews is good.

Programme leaders and coaches are well qualified and have relevant industrial experience. They provide good academic and vocational support to most apprentices.

Leaders and managers have undertaken too few observations of teaching, learning and assessment. They do not have an accurate understanding of the quality of apprentices' experiences. The observations are too limited to have a positive impact on the staff development programme and on the identification and sharing of good practice.

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

Leaders ensure that the arrangements for safeguarding of apprentices are effective. Relevant safeguarding policies and procedures are in place.

Managers maintain an accurate and up-to-date single-central record of the checks undertaken during initial vetting and recruitment of staff. They follow safe recruitment practices. All relevant staff have current Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Leaders and managers ensure that all subcontractors carry out detailed checks on staff involved in the delivery of training to Entrust apprentices and that they keep accurate and up-to-date records of such checks.

Apprenticeship programme leaders and coaches have received relevant training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values. They monitor vigilantly apprentices' welfare and health and safety. Employers are aware of their responsibilities and how to raise concerns if they arise.

Leaders and managers work collaboratively with a relevant range of external agencies. The designated safeguarding lead is appropriately trained and experienced for the role and has benefited from ongoing refresher training. Two directors on Entrust's operational board have day-to-day responsibility for safeguarding, one of whom is also a member of the local safeguarding children's board. They ensure that safeguarding has a high priority in leaders' thinking and that it is a standing item on all Entrust's operational board meetings.

Leaders and managers take their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty seriously. Entrust's 'Prevent' policy and the associated external-speaker policy are both up to date. They set out precisely how leaders and managers respond to the government's 'Prevent' duty. Apprentices are aware of how to keep themselves safe, including how to protect themselves from the specific dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. They know how, and to whom, to report any concerns they have.

Apprentices' understanding of most safeguarding topics is sound. However, information provided to them at induction and throughout their training to extend their knowledge and understanding of how to stay safe online and while using social media is insufficiently comprehensive or thorough. For example, apprentices do not receive specific training or information on how to recognise the difference between a genuine and a fake website. In addition, at the time of the monitoring visit leaders had not produced an e-safety procedure setting out the specific safeguarding and online monitoring arrangements used to protect apprentices while online and using personal mobile technology in a range of settings.

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