

First Intuition Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Lynda Brown HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Conway Mews
London
W1T 6AA

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 providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

First Intuition is an independent learning provider based in Fitzrovia, central London, which specialises in providing accountancy qualifications. In August 2017, First Intuition became a prime contractor for apprenticeships. Of the 79 apprentices funded through the apprenticeship levy, 78 study at level 4 and one at level 3.

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 a clear strategic vision to provide high-quality apprenticeships for the accountancy industry. They have a history of working closely with high-profile accountancy firms, providing a broad range of qualifications prior to offering apprenticeships. Since gaining a directly funded contract, they have continued to build on these strong relationships. These enable them to meet the needs of employers and apprentices under the new levy arrangements.

Managers and tutors have links with accountancy practices, which they use well to keep their knowledge and practice up to date. For example, staff attend professional assessment committees with professional bodies and ensure that they are aware of current developments within accountancy practices. All tutors have accountancy qualifications which enable them to develop apprentices' skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to the businesses in which they work. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the components of apprenticeships, including off-the-job training, and have planned apprenticeship programmes effectively. They communicate their expectations well at the start of the programme so that employers and subcontractors understand what their commitment should be. A newly introduced training programme for employers ensures that line managers understand the requirements for apprentices. This enables them to build relevant tasks into apprentices' work schedules.

Leaders and managers have put in place an effective process to assess apprentices' skills and knowledge at the start of the programme. They do not, however, make good enough use of the outcomes from this assessment to monitor apprentices' progress when they are on the programme. Tutors do not use the outcomes of this assessment to ensure that activities and tasks build on apprentices' prior knowledge and skills.

Staff attend a broad range of training activities related to the accountancy profession, including sharing of good practice. Managers do not, however, have a clear strategy for identifying individual and business training needs or for the development of teaching skills. Managers have identified the need to strengthen the link between staff appraisals and training targets to ensure that training meets the needs of individuals and the organisation. These are not in place.

Leaders and managers do not routinely assess the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, including that in subcontracted provision. They have recognised the need to have a more comprehensive overview of the quality of teaching, but the planned lesson observation process is not in place.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices?

Reasonable progress

The majority of apprentices enjoy their apprenticeship and are highly motivated to learn new skills. The training that they receive relates effectively to their challenging job roles and prepares them well for the demands of working in the accountancy profession. Employers speak positively about the contribution that apprentices make to their businesses.

The large majority of apprentices can explain the new knowledge and skills that they have developed on their apprenticeship, such as double-entry bookkeeping and using systems to input tax details. Most apprentices have improved their personal skills such as improved confidence in communicating with professionals outside the workplace, developing the skills to work within highly professional teams and having a better understanding of ethical standards within their work.

Apprentices have a good understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship programme, including their off-the-job training. The vast majority of apprentices attend a broad range of activities away from their work, such as internal training specific to their employers, online training, skills workshops and revision sessions. Tutors give apprentices good support to prepare them for their end-point assessment. The large majority of apprentices have a good understanding of what they need to do to complete their assessment.

The vast majority of apprentices have good skills in English and mathematics as a requirement of their job role, and they apply these successfully within the work context. For example, apprentices use calculations and write business cases at the required level for their qualification. Tutors support apprentices to improve their English skills through the development of higher-level tasks and the use of technical language within their work activities. Staff provide appropriate support for apprentices who need to take a functional skills qualification.

The large majority of learners receive frequent reviews with their skills coaches. Tutors provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their development tasks. Apprentices appreciate the support that they receive from their tutors.

Where apprentices have already taken examinations as part of their programme, most have passed these at the first attempt. A small minority of apprentices do not know that they can gain high grades and so do not aspire to achieve beyond the minimum pass grade. Apprentices have a good understanding of the career routes available to them within their chosen field. Employers and tutors support them well to work towards their intended career goals.

Leaders and managers have been slow to implement effective quality assurance procedures, including those to monitor the performance of subcontractors. Managers have accurately identified the key areas for improvement within the organisation, but they have not established clear targets to achieve these within a specified timescale. They have not shared these plans effectively with the relevant staff.

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

Leaders have established a clear safeguarding structure with a designated safeguarding lead and two designated safeguarding officers. Managers and staff know their duty to safeguard apprentices. A detailed staff handbook contains guidelines to staff about a range of safeguarding matters, including radicalisation and extremism, mental health and lone working. Staff use these well to safeguard apprentices and know how and when to refer apprentices to outside agencies.

Managers have established rigorous recruitment and selection processes and they carry out appropriate pre-employment checks. They have put in place an effective safeguarding training programme, including the 'Prevent' duty, which staff complete very soon after their appointment. Staff receive training to the appropriate level, depending on their job role, and renew this training every three years.

Apprentices feel safe and are safe. Skills development coaches provide good support to apprentices. Consequently, they understand the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation and how to keep themselves safe. The coaches use relevant materials and case studies to promote discussions with apprentices at induction, during reviews and on skills days. For example, they successfully discussed how to respond appropriately to a recent terrorist attack in London. The large majority of apprentices benefit from workplace training for online safety and for personal health matters such as stress at work.

Leaders and managers have put in place a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan but do not review and update actions often enough. Managers recognise that the risk assessment does not reflect the geographical context in which apprentices work.

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