

NSL Limited

Monitoring visit report

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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.

Established in 2009, NSL Limited provides a range of civil enforcement, highways planning and traffic-management services to local authorities and airports across the country. Since May 2017, the company has been delivering levy-funded apprenticeships through its newly created NSL academy. One-hundred and twenty-four apprentices are on either a level 3 or level 5 business standard.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers do not have sufficient oversight of the progress that apprentices make towards achieving their apprenticeship. They have not implemented a robust enough approach to tracking and monitoring apprentices' progress, in particular to ensure that they complete their programme in the planned time. Too much of the information about apprentices' learning and progress is held by assessors, and not reported on to managers. As a result, leaders and managers are unable to hold staff to account for the progress that apprentices make.

Leaders and managers do not have a formal process for monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They provide informal feedback to tutors following observations of learning sessions, but do not record this in a systematic way to help tutors to develop their practice. Leaders and managers do not have a clear overview of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They consequently do not support teachers to make improvements where necessary, for example in the quality of their feedback to apprentices on their assignments, which too often is poor.

Leaders and managers, in establishing the apprenticeship training, gave insufficient attention to the teaching of English and mathematics. They have recently appointed a Skills for Life manager to support apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills in these subjects, and this is starting to have a positive impact in helping apprentices develop their mathematics skills, although it is less effective for English. The

proportion of apprentices who pass their functional skills English and mathematics examinations is low.

Leaders and managers share a vision and ambition to provide high-quality apprenticeship training. They have implemented an apprenticeship programme that supports individuals to gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to work more effectively on local authority contracts. Leaders' and managers' recruitment process is thorough, and apprentices are carefully selected to ensure that the programme is suitable for them. Consequently, very few apprentices leave the programme. Apprentices have a good understanding of the career benefits that the apprenticeship programme provides. The large majority of apprentices on the level 5 programme have gained additional responsibilities or promotion while on their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers have a secure understanding of the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. They relate the apprenticeship standards successfully to their own business requirements, for example, providing effective customer services on behalf of local councils. Leaders and managers monitor apprentices' entitlement to off-the-job training effectively. They ensure that apprentices' attendance at training days is recorded and that apprentices accurately note the time spent undertaking their off-the-job learning. Leaders and managers have recruited trainers with considerable business experience which benefits apprentices.

Apprentices' line managers receive comprehensive information about their responsibilities before apprentices begin their training. Academy leaders and managers work closely with line managers to ensure that the requirements of the business can be covered while apprentices are training off the job. In addition, apprentices, trainers and apprentices' line managers meet frequently to ensure that apprentices are being allowed time away from their normal job roles to complete the necessary work needed for the apprenticeship.

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

Too many apprentices make slow progress in completing units on their qualifications. A high proportion of apprentices on level 3 and level 5 programmes have either failed to meet the submission deadline for a substantial proportion of their assignments, or have not resubmitted work when their original assignments did not meet the criteria for a pass. Leaders and managers do not have a good enough overview of the progress that apprentices make and have not ensured that trainers support apprentices to catch up.

Trainers, in their feedback on apprentices' assignment work at level 3, do not identify in enough detail how apprentices can improve their work to ensure that they achieve

a pass. For those apprentices who pass assignments, trainers do not provide any information on what they can do to gain a higher grade. As a result, level 3 apprentices do not understand the progress that they are making and what they need to do to improve. Trainers' feedback to the small number of apprentices on the level 5 programme is of a very high standard; trainers give constructive guidance on how apprentices can improve their work.

Apprentices are not clear about the requirements of their end-point assessment and what they need to do to achieve a merit or distinction grade. Trainers have not set apprentices target grades and, as a result, apprentices have no indication of the grades they should aim to achieve.

Leaders and managers assess apprentices carefully when they begin their apprenticeship. In conjunction with the apprentices' line managers and trainers they review the apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and experience to determine their training needs at the start of the apprenticeship. Trainers carefully record and regularly review apprentices' short- and long-term career aspirations. However, when planning learning, trainers do not take sufficient account of what they know about apprentices' starting points. They pay insufficient attention to what individual apprentices will learn. For example, trainers do not specify clearly in training sessions what apprentices will know or be able to do and how this learning will be achieved.

Trainers do not plan sufficiently for the development of apprentices' skills in English or mathematics. For example, on level 3 apprenticeships these topics are taught separately from, and without sufficient reference to, the apprentices' learning on other components of their programmes. Apprentices make slow progress in achieving their functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics and in using their skills in relation to their work setting. For example, a minority of apprentices make grammatical errors in their written work.

Most apprentices are highly motivated, as they value the opportunity to develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours that are relevant to their job roles. Apprentices develop their knowledge of various management theories which they apply effectively in different work-related situations. For example, apprentices spoke positively about the skills they had gained in project management, improved communication with their teams, and line managing staff.

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

Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective, they have suitable policies in place which are reviewed regularly.

Apprentices receive appropriate safeguarding training at induction. This includes information on how to keep themselves safe when dealing with the public and how

to manage conflict which they may face as part of their job. Apprentices feel confident about reporting issues to their manager or to an externally provided helpline and know that these will be dealt with effectively.

Apprentices receive effective support to keep them safe. They receive guidance at the start of their programme on how they can access support on a range of mental-health and wellbeing needs. Apprentices receive ongoing advice on the safe use of computers. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

Leaders and managers have established effective links with local authority safeguarding groups in the geographical areas in which they operate. Leaders and managers know what to do should there be a safeguarding incident with one of the apprentices.

Leaders and managers ensure that appropriate pre-employment checks are carried out prior to an individual joining the academy. A newly appointed designated safeguarding lead has yet to receive appropriate training, although this is planned. Leaders and managers do not record all incidents on a central register. As a result, leaders and managers are not able to identify trends and provide access to support before issues arise. All staff and apprentices have attended 'Prevent' duty training. As a result, they have a good understanding of their responsibilities to report any concerns.

Trainers do not integrate safeguarding and information on the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism sufficiently into their training and their discussions with apprentices at progress reviews. As a result, apprentices have a limited understanding of how these topics apply to them in their workplace and in their lives.

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