

AMS Nationwide Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

AMS Nationwide Ltd (AMS) was established in 2012. The company was accepted onto the Register of Approved Training Providers in September 2017. The first apprentices enrolled on programmes in October 2017. AMS has contracts for delivery of levy and non-levy-funded apprenticeships.

Currently, 413 apprentices are enrolled on standards-based and framework apprenticeships, 98 of whom are levy-funded apprentices. Seven apprentices are enrolled on framework apprenticeships and 406 are enrolled on standards-based apprenticeships. Almost all apprentices are aged 25 and over. Customer services programmes at level 2 account for 380 apprentices, while 36 apprentices are enrolled on rail engineering programmes at level 3, teaching and learning programmes at level 3, and operations/departmental manager programmes at level 5. AMS provides apprenticeships for eight employers. A total of 315 apprentices are with one employer; almost all these apprentices are enrolled on customer service programmes at level 2. AMS subcontracts 30 apprenticeships in rail engineering to Stobart Rail.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Senior leaders' expectations of apprentices, staff, employers and subcontractors are low. This impedes them from achieving their aim of becoming the best apprenticeship and skills partnership for employers.

Following a staffing restructure in April 2018 that resulted in the departure of the managing director in June 2018, leaders made improvements to the planning and development of apprenticeship programmes. Although minor improvements are evident, it is too soon to measure the impact on the quality of training or on apprentices' progress of many of the actions that leaders have taken.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that programmes meet the requirements of levy and non-levy-funded apprenticeships. Most apprentices are unaware of the components of their programme and many are unsure of the planned timeframe for their apprenticeship. Many apprentices do not know that they can achieve high grades on their programmes and, therefore, do not challenge themselves to achieve a higher grade than a pass.

Managers do not identify apprentices' starting points when enrolling them on programmes. For example, managers recruit apprentices who have senior management roles to customer service apprenticeships at level 2. As a result, apprentices fail to develop new knowledge, skills or behaviours. Many apprentices have been in their job roles for significant periods of time and are merely accrediting the skills that they already have rather than learning new skills.

Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of apprentices' progress and are unaware of apprentices who may be at risk of not completing their programme. Consequently, too many apprentices leave their programmes early or make very slow progress.

Many quality assurance and improvement arrangements are very new. Recently introduced monitoring processes to check that training is of high quality are yet to have any discernible impact. For example, the monthly performance management arrangements for staff have yet to be implemented and an electronic tracking system to monitor apprentices' progress has been purchased but is yet to be introduced.

Self-assessment processes have resulted in a realistic self-assessment report. The report correctly identifies many significant weaknesses in the provision. However, leaders and managers have been slow to respond to these weaknesses.

The newly revised observation of teaching, learning and assessment process shows that observers continue to focus too much on what the training adviser does rather than the learning that is taking place. Not all aspects of apprentices' programmes are included in the observation of teaching, learning and assessment.

Governance is weak. The board of directors has met twice since AMS became a levy and non-levy-funded provider. Directors focus on sales targets and finance during board meetings. They provide too little challenge to leaders and managers about improving the quality of provision. Directors are unaware of the progress that apprentices make or the quality of the training that they receive. They do not hold leaders and managers sufficiently to account for their actions.

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

Most apprentices make slow or very slow progress towards the completion of their programme. In many cases, apprentices have been on programme for three quarters or more of their planned timeframe and have completed very little work. They do not know what they need to do to meet the requirements of the programme or the end-point assessment.

Ineffective and inaccurate assessments of apprentices' starting points result in too many apprentices being enrolled on inappropriate programmes. Consequently, apprentices are not acquiring substantial new knowledge, skills or behaviours as part of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices and training advisers do not record off-the-job training consistently. As a result, it is unclear whether apprentices are receiving their full entitlement to off-the-job training. Where off-the-job training is recorded, the records show that the quality of the training is not high enough and is not personalised to ensure that it meets apprentices' individual needs or job roles. Much off-the-job training focuses on research completed by apprentices, with little variety in the activities that they complete. Training advisers often complete off-the-job training records for apprentices, and they do not record the time taken to complete the training. As a result of the weaknesses in off-the-job training, apprentices fail to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours sufficiently.

Targets set with, and for, apprentices on teaching and learning visits are weak and apprentices frequently fail to meet them. Targets are not personalised according to apprentices' individual needs. As a result, apprentices make slow progress and fail to achieve their programmes within the planned timescale.

Training advisers do not develop apprentices' English and mathematical skills well enough. Too few apprentices achieve functional skills qualifications, particularly in English and mathematics at level 2. Training advisers do not correct spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' work consistently, which means that apprentices repeat their mistakes. In a few cases, training advisers have poor English skills, and they mark spelling, grammar and punctuation incorrectly in apprentices' work. Training advisers' feedback to apprentices following assessment fails to help apprentices to improve the quality of their work.

The tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress is weak. Managers and training advisers do not have a good enough understanding of the progress that apprentices are making. Although managers have a register of apprentices who are at risk of not achieving their programmes, they have failed to put into place plans to help those apprentices who are behind with their work to catch up.

Recent actions to improve apprentices' experience are beginning to have a positive impact on the small minority of apprentices in financial services. Most of these apprentices are now preparing effectively for their end-point assessment.

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is well qualified, extremely knowledgeable and has significant experience of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding officers are suitably qualified to perform their duties. Policies and procedures for safeguarding are rigorous and updated regularly. Staff and apprentices understand the procedure for reporting safeguarding concerns and, consequently, apprentices know to whom they should report any safeguarding concerns. The DSL provides regular safeguarding updates to staff during staff development days and team meetings.

The DSL is passionate about improving and maintaining positive mental health for staff and apprentices. She is a qualified counsellor and works closely with staff and apprentices to ensure good mental health, mindfulness and well-being.

Leaders use safe recruitment checks when recruiting new staff. Mandatory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks are in place for all staff working with apprentices and most staff have now signed up to the annual update service for DBS checks. Managers routinely check the right of members of staff to work in the United Kingdom and their eligibility for roles.

Staff receive good staff development to raise their awareness and understanding of the 'Prevent' duty. All have attended workshops to raise awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and benefit from additional training from external agencies. Apprentices in the financial services sector have a good awareness of potential terrorist threats through, for example, money laundering and the funding of terrorist activities. They understand the steps that they should follow should they identify these risks. Staff and apprentices, where relevant, have a good understanding of ACT Awareness, which aims to protect the public from terrorist threats through partnership working with businesses.

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