

Dutton Fisher Associates Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1276426

Name of lead inspector: Malcolm Fraser HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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 the *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.

The two current directors established Dutton Fisher Associates in 2009. Initially, the provider delivered vocational and apprenticeship training as a subcontractor, and also directly to a number of businesses on a full-cost, commercially funded basis. Dutton Fisher Associates started to deliver levy-funded apprenticeships in May 2017.

Currently, 224 apprentices are on programmes, almost all of whom are on standards-based apprenticeships. Dutton Fisher Associates works with levy-paying employers to provide apprenticeship training for their employees. Around four fifths of apprentices are on housing and property management apprenticeships from level 2 to level 4. Local authorities and housing associations across England employ these apprentices. The remaining apprentices are on team leader apprenticeships at level 3, departmental manager apprenticeships at level 5 and business administration apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3. Dutton Fisher Associates does not use subcontractors.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders design and deliver apprenticeships in close and effective collaboration with employers. A director meets initially with senior leaders from employers with whom the provider wishes to engage to deliver apprenticeships. Through ongoing and constructive dialogue, leaders work with employers to develop programmes that effectively meet employers' needs. Leaders reinforce with employers the principles and requirements of successful apprenticeships. They only progress their proposals for the delivery of apprenticeships with employers who are prepared to commit to the proposals. This ensures that apprentices are new recruits with little or no prior experience, or are recent appointees to new roles at a higher level, or are on programmes to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they need to progress to roles with a higher level of responsibility.

Through a team of mentors, some of whom are also tutors, leaders ensure that apprentices develop and improve their attitudes and behaviours. Employers are right to be very complimentary about the mentoring provided for apprentices by Dutton Fisher Associates. Leaders at one employer target their recruitment of new apprentices at the long-term unemployed and disadvantaged members of the communities that they serve. They accurately identify that their apprentices make significant improvements in their personal confidence, their effectiveness in carrying out their roles, and their resilience when dealing with challenging clients. They are right to recognise that this is a result of the support that apprentices receive during their programmes.

Leaders and tutors ensure that employers have a good awareness of the need for apprentices to receive sufficient time to complete planned off-the-job training, and that apprentices themselves understand this requirement. Programme proposals agreed with employers and handbooks provided for apprentices and their workplace supervisors contain a range of off-the-job training activities. They also provide a schedule for completing the activities. As a result, most apprentices receive their entitlement to planned off-the-job training, and this enables them to make good progress. Leaders and tutors are quick to identify when, because of work demands, apprentices occasionally do not receive sufficient time for training. In these instances, leaders work effectively with employers to ensure that departmental managers responsible for apprentices provide the necessary time.

Leaders have recruited appropriately qualified tutors and mentors to deliver all aspects of apprenticeship programmes. They have increased the number of tutors recently in response to the growing number of apprentices. To manage this growth effectively, and to ensure that quality assurance and performance management arrangements sustain the quality of provision, leaders have recently appointed an operations and quality manager. Since this appointment, the provider has improved its approach to the safe recruitment of staff. Leaders now request references for all new tutors, which they had not done previously, despite knowing that they needed to check on applicants' previous employment.

Leaders and the operations and quality manager monitor the progress of apprentices effectively. They have sufficiently strong evidence to show that most apprentices make good progress, and that a very high proportion remain on their programmes. However, leaders are right to recognise that the systems in place to monitor apprentices' progress require further development to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of apprentices. Leaders are investing in new systems to support this. Currently, they monitor progress through monthly reports from tutors that are not consistently reliable due to differences in how tutors interpret the criteria relating to progress. As a result, leaders are unable to evaluate in depth the progress that apprentices make against each aspect of their programme.

Leaders have an accurate and well-informed view about the strengths of the provision and the areas that require improvement. They have established well-

defined plans, supported by clear actions, to improve the quality of apprenticeships. At the same time, they manage the planned growth of the provision effectively.

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

Leaders and tutors work effectively with employers to plan apprenticeship programmes that enable apprentices to develop and apply new skills, knowledge and behaviours effectively in their work. Tutors are well qualified in the subjects that they teach. They use their knowledge and skills effectively to provide challenging learning activities in workshops, as part of apprentices' off-the-job training. Tutors provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their work. This enables apprentices to make improvements to their work and make good progress.

Tutors have high levels of vocational expertise in housing and property management, team leading and business administration. This expertise gives employers confidence that the apprenticeship programme will develop apprentices into more effective employees and will add value to their businesses. Apprentices enjoy and value greatly the training that they receive. They are committed to developing their careers, and they understand how their apprenticeship will help them to achieve their ambitions.

All apprentices complete a thorough induction at the start of their programme. Tutors provide apprentices and their workplace supervisors with detailed information about the structure of the apprenticeship, what they need to achieve, and the arrangements for the end-point assessment. Apprentices are clear about the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they need to gain and demonstrate. They know about the assessment processes, but they are not aware of what they need to do to achieve distinction grades.

Tutors use a range of procedures during induction to establish apprentices' starting points. However, they do not use this information when they plan the activities that apprentices will undertake to gain the vocationally specific skills and knowledge required for their apprenticeships. Tutors and mentors use the information about apprentices' starting points effectively to provide personal support through the mentoring programme. They also use it to provide English and mathematics training towards functional skills qualifications for apprentices who need to gain these qualifications. Apprentices who join the programme with qualifications in English or mathematics that exempt them from taking functional skills qualifications are unaware about how to develop further their English and mathematical skills.

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

Leaders take their responsibilities to promote a culture of safeguarding seriously and have established effective arrangements to safeguard apprentices. They identify accurately the aspects that need strengthening and have clear plans to improve these aspects that include applying safe recruitment procedures for all staff.

Apprentices feel safe and have a good awareness about how to stay safe and protect others. Staff cover safeguarding in detail during apprentices' inductions to their programmes. They revisit these themes during apprentices' programmes, particularly during their one-to-one sessions with mentors. Many of the housing and property management apprentices have a very good awareness about the risks of radicalisation and extremism. This has a high profile in their day-to-day work in communities and when dealing with tenants. These topics feature prominently in occupationally specific learning activities. However, the awareness of apprentices on other programmes, and of housing and property management apprentices who do not work directly with tenants, is limited. Tutors do not take steps to develop these apprentices' understanding, during workshops and reviews of progress, about the risks of radicalisation and extremism beyond a basic level.

One of the directors is the designated safeguarding lead who has undergone appropriate training. She keeps up-to-date records showing that all staff have appropriate checks to confirm their suitability for working with young people and vulnerable adults. The records also confirm that staff have completed safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty.

Apprentices and staff have a good understand about how to report concerns relating to safeguarding. Staff use the clear procedure that is in place to notify the designated lead of any safeguarding or welfare concerns. The designated lead maintains a confidential record of referrals made, actions taken and the outcomes of the few concerns raised.

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