

C & J Clark International

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1276453

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Inspection date(s): 14–15 November 2018

Type of provider: Employer

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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.

C & J Clark International Ltd. (Clarks) became an employer-provider of apprenticeships in May 2017, offering the level 4 standards-based apprenticeship in retail store management. Its first cohort of 31 existing employees began their apprenticeships in July 2017. Apprentices were working as store managers, assistant store managers or team leaders in Clarks retail outlets across the UK and Republic of Ireland. Four of the 31 employees were not eligible for ESFA funding as they worked in either Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Most of the first cohort of apprentices have now completed or are very close to the end of their programme. A second cohort of Clarks apprentices has been selected and will start their level 4 programme in January 2019. Clarks staff provide direct training, assessment and support to learners on the programme. Apprentices who need to improve their English and mathematics skills to the minimum levels required for the apprenticeship receive training from a subcontractor, InTraining.

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 ensured that the level 4 retail store manager apprenticeship is challenging, well organised and well resourced. It meets the ESFA's requirements for successful apprenticeship provision. Leaders and managers are strongly committed to providing an effective programme which meets the needs of Clarks' business and learners. Leaders and managers have a very clearly articulated objective that is to develop aspiring and existing store managers' skills, so the business can remain competitive in the increasingly fast-changing United Kingdom high street retail environment. Clarks' leaders are committed to investing in staff learning, which apprentices value and respect. Senior leaders promote the apprenticeship programme strongly, providing potential apprentices with clear and realistic information about the challenge and benefits involved. Leaders have

positioned the apprenticeship programme as the lead component of Clarks' wider training and development strategy for staff working in its retail settings.

Leaders and managers' quality improvement arrangements are very thorough, embodying continuous improvement practice which has a resolute focus on supporting learners and developing their learning. Managers monitor the programme's effectiveness routinely using a range of structured evaluation meetings informed by learner surveys, performance monitoring outcomes and direct learner feedback. Managers' action planning for improvement is specific, realistic and timebound. The two self-assessment reports produced so far this year are highly evaluative, inclusive and accurate. Governance arrangements are rigorous and thorough.

Managers have successfully incorporated numerous, often subtle, changes to aspects of apprentices' training, assessment and support which are benefiting current apprentices. Much of this learning has also been incorporated into a revised and improved approach to apprentice selection, teaching, assessment, planning, resourcing and support for the next planned level 4 cohort.

Clarks' managers have been quick to identify what is working well in the apprenticeship and what needs to be improved. For example, leaders and managers took decisive action to close a level 3 team leader apprenticeship only five months after it began in February 2018. They recognised that their planning and delivery of this programme had been naive. They had recruited too many apprentices who struggled to meet the standards expected, and by the time of its closure around half had already left the programme early. Managers have since made good efforts to ensure that the former apprentices still have access to relevant and accessible professional development. This includes priority access to a range of pilot programmes in retail leadership. One former level 3 apprentice has been accepted onto the level 4 programme next year.

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

Managers and staff directly responsible for programme delivery are very well-qualified and highly experienced in the retail sector. They use this knowledge and expertise very well to train, coach and assess apprentices. Assessors are in direct, and telephone, contact with apprentices regularly and provide useful feedback and assessment that is mapped clearly against the apprenticeship standard. In the early stages of the programme, a small number of apprentices found it difficult to balance the demands of work and learning. Recognising this, managers worked hard to ensure that apprentices were given appropriate time to study. Apprentices are positive about the good levels of support they receive to help them with their studies, such as additional support to manage dyslexia, extra tutoring and flexible examination arrangements.

Managers have established a programme of well-planned, off-the-job training workshops for apprentices around the country, which apprentices find extremely informative and developmental. Apprentices use these opportunities well to meet and work alongside their peers from other outlets around the country. Apprentices' attendance at the workshops is excellent.

Apprentices improve their leadership skills, become positive role models for staff, manage staff more effectively and improve their ability to manage 'difficult conversations' with staff that may be necessary. Apprentices value their learning about retail legislation and governance. They have used their understanding well to improve performance management of their teams involving aspects such as dealing with overtime, the minimum wage, working hours and holiday entitlements. They learn broad and specific health and safety considerations about, for example, the care of young customers and customers' children while they are in the shop.

Apprentices learn new vocational skills, and gain knowledge and confidence that they use well in their retail workplaces. For example, apprentices successfully apply research and merchandising strategies to change their shop's range of stock to better meet the needs of local customers, leading to higher sales and profit. Apprentices have made physical improvements to their retail environments as a result of what they have been taught on the programme. Other examples include apprentices who identify the difficulties retailers were experiencing in their high street location and then devised successful strategies with staff to maximise sales in the summer 'back to school' period.

Apprentices develop innovative and ambitious business projects as part of their apprenticeship to improve customer experience and loyalty. For example, analysing the viability and benefits of introducing mobile pay points to reduce waiting times for customers and help wheelchair users pay for their goods more easily. Aligning stock checks to sales calendar has helped improved efficiency and ensured that there is always sufficient product to meet seasonal demand.

The business project activity is effective in developing apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity. Many apprentices' projects involve extensive community engagement. For example, they work with schools and families to create lifelong brand loyalty, provide mobile foot measuring and shoe fitting services for care settings and for learning disability groups, and reduce waste through alternative approaches to product packaging.

Apprentices speak positively about how much more confident they have become, how their communication skills have developed and how they are more effective in team meetings and training. Some striking examples exist, such as apprentices developing pride when being asked to do a presentation about their experiences to the next group of apprentices and to a group of senior managers.

On successful completion of their apprenticeship around two thirds of apprentices have so far been given opportunities to further extend, develop and apply their skills

in, for example, larger outlets or to contribute to improvement projects where outlets are underperforming. However, these opportunities are not yet structured well enough to provide a more consistent entitlement for all apprentices.

Managers provide apprentices with a learning record which helps to organise and record their learning. The record focuses on occupational skills; however, it does not place sufficient focus on developing behaviours or promote the attainment of higher achievement, such as a distinction. The proportion of students achieving at distinction level is, so far, small.

Managers recognise that there is more scope to integrate English and mathematics even further into apprenticeship programmes. Apprentices who have skills in English and mathematics at the level required on starting the programme are capable of greater improvements in these subjects as they progress through the programme.

As a few apprentices have not yet completed their programmes it is too early to tell accurately what proportion of this first cohort will achieve their qualification. However, the potential is that it will be around 75%. Managers have set a target of around 85% overall attainment for the next cohort. The proportion completing their qualification within the planned timescale is around 55%.

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

Managers have ensured that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place for apprentices. Apprentices feel safe and are safe. Managers maintain close ties with each apprentice and know them well. Apprentices trust and respect development staff. Managers provide apprentices with very effective and prompt pastoral and professional support to ensure that they remain on the programme. Managers and staff have responded quickly and appropriately to the very few safeguarding-related concerns raised by apprentices.

Managers have developed clear safeguarding policies and procedures, including a well-defined safeguarding policy that identifies key safeguarding principles and procedures for all employees, including apprentices.

Apprentices know how to report any safeguarding concerns. However, apprentices currently have a less well-developed understanding of the role of the three designated safeguarding officers (DSOs).

The DSOs have had appropriate safeguarding training and have a good practical understanding of safeguarding generally. The DSOs maintain clear and confidential records in relation to any safeguarding issues raised. However, they have yet to find a way to forge meaningful links with local authority safeguarding boards across the UK.

Trainers introduce apprentices well to safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values, during induction and in training workshops. Trainers invite external speakers to workshops, such as police with specialist knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty, which apprentices find interesting and memorable. However, opportunities to develop apprentices' understanding of safeguarding in wider contexts, through in-depth discussion with assessors during face-to-face and telephone contact, are not routinely grasped. Apprentices have a good understanding of the dangers of online radicalisation but are slightly less clear about wider aspects of online safety while using social media.

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