

Utility and Construction Training Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Shahram Safavi, HMI

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Address: Pembroke House
Carrington Business Park
Manchester Road
Carrington
Manchester
M31 4DD



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 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.

Utility and Construction Training Limited (UCT) was established about 10 years ago. The company offers specialised courses nationally for businesses involved in the operation and maintenance of water supply and distribution network, high-voltage electrical distribution and gas supply.

In May 2017, the company began to train apprentices funded through the apprenticeship levy. Prior to May 2017, for around four years, UCT offered apprenticeships on a subcontracted basis. There are 112 levy-funded apprentices in training and a further 20 apprentices are completing their training with the company as part of its subcontracting arrangements. The great majority of apprentices follow the standards-based apprenticeship at levels 2 and 3, and the remainder are on apprenticeship frameworks. Approximately one fifth of the company's business receives government funding.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders have used effectively their extensive experience and knowledge of the skill requirements of employers involved in the utilities industry. This has enabled them to increase their provision, for example through the development of the Carrington training facility. They work very closely with employers in the delivery of all aspects of the curriculum, including apprentices' on- and off-the-job training. They frequently inform employers about the skills and industry-specific knowledge that individual apprentices gain throughout their training period. They offer apprentices a wide range of additional qualifications. These increase their readiness for taking on extra responsibilities and enhance their productivity in their job roles. For example, apprentices gain additional qualifications in 'SHEA Water', 'Water Hygiene' and 'SHEA Power'.

Managers use their knowledge of apprentices' job roles and their career plans to ensure that they study on appropriate programmes at suitable levels. Managers

ensure that apprentices' job roles provide them with the range of experiences required to develop the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours for their qualifications. In a few cases, changes to employers' business operations mean that this is not feasible. Managers, however, have suitable contingency measures in place to provide apprentices with the required practical skills. For example, they arrange for these apprentices to have short periods of work experience with other employers.

Apprentices receive their full entitlements in relation to all aspects of their training. The provision meets the requirements of apprenticeships fully. Managers frequently scrutinise apprentices' progress towards completion of their apprenticeships. They check apprentices' attendance on their planned training blocks in the company's training centre. They take effective actions to ensure that apprentices attend their sessions and arrange additional training sessions for apprentices who need to catch up on their work.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths of the provision and which improvements they need to make. Managers frequently observe the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment. When they focus on what apprentices learn, they identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses in trainers' practices. Following these observations, they offer trainers useful examples and suggestions on how to improve. When managers do not focus on apprentices' learning and development, their judgements are inaccurate. Consequently, not all trainers receive accurate feedback on how to improve their practices.

Leaders and managers respond well to employers' and apprentices' feedback on the improvements they need to make. For example, they have developed a fully equipped electrical workshop to train apprentices using high-voltage equipment. In the regular meetings of the board of directors, leaders focus on the quality of the provision and the required developments. However, they have not established suitable arrangements for the independent challenge of, and support for, senior leaders so as to ensure the development of the provision.

The arrangements for improving apprentices' English and mathematical skills require improvement. Those apprentices who are exempt from the requirement to achieve functional skills do not receive sufficient support to extend their skills in these areas. Apprentices have access to online resources to improve their skills in English and mathematics. However, managers do not monitor whether apprentices use these resources. When apprentices do access these resources, they do not have the benefit of the support of qualified specialist tutors in English and mathematics. The proportion of apprentices who pass their functional skills in mathematics is too low.

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**

Experienced and knowledgeable trainers coach individual apprentices effectively to develop their vocational skills and behaviours. They make learning relevant. For example, they use their experience of failure in underground water mains systems to promote a lively discussion on the topic.

Apprentices receive good support from trainers during their programmes. Trainers provide good individual support during practical sessions. They offer additional guidance after lessons for any apprentice who requests assistance. Trainers ensure that apprentices undertake their practical tasks carefully so that they become confident in their skills. For example, water services apprentices can fit saddles and ferrules competently. Apprentices on the gas team leader programmes have a thorough understanding of safe excavation techniques, risk assessment and the importance of following industry's guidelines and legislation.

Apprentices are right to be proud of the new skills and knowledge they gain. They recognise that the insights that they develop in their use of machinery and equipment will help them to improve their productivity in the workplace. They understand clearly that the behaviours that they acquire will help them to gain promotion or to take on more responsibility. For example, apprentices on high-voltage power apprenticeships who are on jointers' mate courses recognise how the successful completion of the course will help them to progress to become jointers.

Trainers monitor in detail the experience that they expect apprentices will gain with employers. Through effective partnership working with employers, trainers ensure that the training and experience that apprentices receive in work links appropriately to their off-the-job training. Trainers have a detailed knowledge of apprentices' progress and development towards completion of their qualifications. They set them well-considered tasks to help them gain and develop the experience, skills and the knowledge that they require for their end-point assessments. As a result, all the apprentices who have so far attempted their end-point assessments have been successful. Seven apprentices achieved distinction grades and five achieved pass grades.

Apprentices benefit significantly from learning and practising their tasks on a wide range of industry-standard equipment and machinery. The tasks that they undertake in their training are directly comparable to tasks in the workplace. This helps them to become more efficient at work.

Staff offer apprentices detailed induction that helps them to understand the requirements of their apprenticeships. This includes guidance on how trainers plan their curriculum, and the standards that they must achieve. This also includes information about end-point assessments. Apprentices receive a detailed induction

booklet which helps them to settle into their programmes and to be confident to seek any help and advice that they require.

Not all trainers use the information about apprentices' existing vocational skills to set them challenging individual learning and developmental targets. Most apprentices receive the same tasks to complete. Consequently, the most able apprentices do not receive sufficient challenge.

Trainers' feedback on apprentices' written work does not help them to improve their work to their full ability. Too often, trainers' feedback does not inform areas for apprentices to develop. Trainers do not ensure that apprentices have clear learning targets to address their knowledge gaps when they give inaccurate answers.

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

Leaders and managers have established a strong ethos of health and safety that reinforces well employers' high priorities for safe working practices. This has resulted in apprentices following robust health and safety practices, including their good use of personal protective equipment.

Leaders have developed effective policies and practices to keep apprentices safe from harm, including from risks of working online, radicalisation and extremism. Safeguarding has a high priority. A senior leader who is responsible for all aspects of safeguarding has completed the relevant qualifications at the appropriate level. He is supported by a deputy safeguarding officer who has received appropriate training for the role. Although apprentices are all aged 18 and over, leaders have recently established appropriate risk assessment policies to ensure that apprentices are safe when they stay in hotels during their training periods. To date, there have not been any safeguarding referrals. Managers have suitable arrangements to record and investigate safeguarding issues. The arrangements for external support, if required, are suitable.

Leaders ensure that they check applicants' backgrounds thoroughly for suitability for their job roles before they employ them. This includes an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check.

All staff have completed training on safeguarding, and on their duty in relation to the risks of radicalisation and extremism. For the last few years, they have regularly completed refresher training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. They ensure that they have up-to-date information about the relevant issues. Managers and trainers regularly discuss various aspects of safeguarding with apprentices. This means that apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding matters. However, not all apprentices have a good awareness of the dangers associated with extremism, and how these issues relate to their lives and work.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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