

# Vortex Training Solutions Limited

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 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.

Vortex Training Solutions Limited (Vortex Training) started as an independent training provider in 2016. It is also a provider of adult education as a subcontractor to two colleges. In April 2017, Vortex Training gained registration to receive public funding to deliver training in its own right. It currently provides training for 105 apprentices, most of whom are over 24 years of age. Half are studying apprenticeships at level 2, a third at level 3 and the rest at level 5. Almost all apprentices are on standards-based apprenticeships. Around a quarter of apprentices are on the level 2 customer service practitioner apprenticeship. The remaining apprentices are on programmes in care, business and management, engineering, and information and communication technologies. Vortex Training works with four employers. Two thirds of apprentices are in the north east and the remaining apprentices are in Coventry. Since September 2018, Vortex Training has worked with two subcontractors that deliver standards-based apprenticeships at level 3 to seven apprentices in infrastructure technician, rail engineering technician and maintenance and operations engineering technician.

### Themes

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

#### **Insufficient progress**

Although directors, leaders and managers have a shared vision to become a high-quality provider, they do not dedicate enough time to the development and delivery of the apprenticeship contract. Consequently, they have not realised their strategic vision. Directors and leaders fail to ensure that they meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers do not plan, coordinate or track effectively on- and off-the-job training. Directors', leaders' and managers' actions to ensure that apprentices receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training have not been successful on most apprenticeships.

Leaders and managers have not put in place effective actions to ensure the quality of their apprenticeship programmes. They do not have an oversight of the progress that apprentices make from their starting points. As a result, apprentices fail to make the progress of which they are capable or complete their programmes in the planned time. A third of apprentices have not achieved their programmes on time. Managers are right to recognise this as a weakness. They have begun to make changes, such as the implementation of a progress tracker, but the impact of these changes is not yet evident.

Leaders and managers fail to check the quality of provision sufficiently or set challenging targets to improve. Directors identify weaknesses, such as the management and teaching of functional skills and the poor retention of apprentices on level 2 customer service apprenticeships. They do not, however, have a clear strategy to deal with them.

The outcomes of the observations of teaching and learning are too positive. Observers focus too much on what the training consultants do, and not on the progress that apprentices make or the skills and knowledge that they gain. The appointment of a quality manager has resulted in recent improvements in the accuracy of the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning.

Leaders' and managers' checking of the quality of subcontractors before commencing work with them is poor. While leaders have implemented appropriate due diligence processes, they do not follow them through. For example, they do not ensure that they receive on time from the subcontractor all the documents that they want to scrutinise.

Board members do not hold leaders and managers to account effectively. They do not receive sufficient or appropriate reports and information about apprentices' progress, achievements and the quality of training, which is often of a poor standard. They are right to recognise that governance is not yet effective, and they have recently appointed a consultant to challenge and support them.

Leaders and managers have established positive working relationships with employers. They work effectively with employers to ensure that apprentices are on the right programme at the right level. Most apprentices remain on their programme, but almost a third of apprentices on the level 2 customer service practitioner standards-based programme have left their apprenticeship early. Leaders and managers have developed the content of the training programme in collaboration with employers, who appreciate the frequent contact they have with leaders and managers.

Leaders and managers identify poorly performing staff. They take suitable action, and, where appropriate, staff who do not improve leave Vortex Training.

**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 training consultants do not plan individual apprentices' programmes with their employers. They fail to involve employers routinely in reviewing the progress that apprentices make. As a result, apprentices often make slow progress and receive insufficient off-the-job training.

Training consultants do not use apprentices' existing skills and knowledge, identified at the start of their apprenticeship, to plan individual programmes. The activities that they use are not stimulating enough to challenge the most able apprentices.

The quality of training consultants' assessment, recording and review of apprentices' progress is ineffective in most cases. Training consultants do not provide apprentices with specific guidance on what they have achieved or what they need to do next. The targets that they set are not precise enough. Consequently, apprentices do not make rapid enough progress.

Training consultants do not prepare apprentices thoroughly enough for their end-point assessment. They do not set or review target grades for apprentices until they prepare for their end-point assessment. Of the apprentices who have completed so far, only half achieved a distinction grade despite all of them expecting to achieve this grade.

Training consultants do not ensure that apprentices benefit from sufficient high-quality off-the-job training. Most apprentices only have access to formal training sessions with their training consultant once a month. Too many apprentices complete work in their own time. As a result, apprentices fail to develop a deeper understanding and are unable to recall what they have learned.

Leaders and managers fail to ensure that training in English and mathematics is effective and, as a result, apprentices do not make sufficient progress in developing their English and mathematical skills. Training consultants do not provide feedback to apprentices on the quality of their written work. Consequently, apprentices do not improve their writing skills. Apprentices who need to complete functional skills qualifications as part of their programme do not receive enough guidance on how to improve their English and mathematics skills. As a result, only a third of apprentices pass their functional skills English and mathematics examinations at their first attempt.

Leaders and managers appoint sufficient staff who are suitably qualified and experienced. Most training consultants have good skills and knowledge, which they use well in lessons. For example, level 5 apprentices understand blood pressure

readings and when to alert nursing staff of any concerns they may have. Apprentices take part in effective professional discussions which extend their knowledge.

Apprentices on level 3 and level 5 programmes enjoy learning new skills which they and their employer value. For example, they learn clinical skills, such as checking oxygen levels in blood, which they then use in their workplace. Level 3 customer service apprentices deal better with customers' complaints.

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

Leaders and managers have put in place effective arrangements for safeguarding. They have established suitable safeguarding policies and practices, including an appropriate 'Prevent' duty risk register and action plan. During the inspection, leaders took swift action to address minor errors in their safeguarding documentation.

Apprentices feel safe in the workplace. Employers support them well to stay safe at work, and apprentices understand what help is available should they need it. Apprentices on care programmes show a good understanding of how to keep people in their care safe.

Managers ensure that effective safer recruitment practices are in place for subcontractors and Vortex Training staff. They check staff references and their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom. Managers ensure that all staff who work on the apprenticeship programme have the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. Managers put in place suitable chaperone arrangements for face-to-face sessions for staff who are waiting for their DBS certificate.

Leaders and managers have not yet tested their systems and procedures because they have not had to investigate any safeguarding incidents. The designated senior leader with responsibility for safeguarding and the deputy designated safeguarding officer have completed appropriate safeguarding training. Leaders and managers have established effective relationships with external agencies, including the local safeguarding board and the local 'Prevent' duty coordinator.

A minority of apprentices on level 2 customer service apprenticeships do not have a good understanding of radicalisation and extremism. They are unaware of how the potential risks apply to them, whether in their everyday life or at work. Level 5 care apprentices and level 3 customer service apprentices know how to recognise the signs associated with radicalisation and extremism.

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