

NowSkills Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	1280342
Name of lead inspector:	Shahram Safavi HMI
Inspection dates:	4–5 December 2018
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Melrose House 183 Chorley New Road Bolton BL1 4QZ

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.

Kainuu Limited, now NowSkills Limited (NowSkills), was established in May 2013. The company offers information and communication technology courses in north-west England. Tutors teach most of the theory lessons in NowSkills' two training centres in Manchester and Liverpool. The company has offered apprenticeships as a subcontractor since it was established. In May 2017, NowSkills began to train apprentices funded through the apprenticeship levy.

At the time of this monitoring visit, NowSkills has 39 apprentices enrolled on level 3 standards-based apprenticeships. Almost all apprentices are aged 16 to 18. They are on infrastructure technician, digital marketer and software development technician programmes. A further seven apprentices are completing their training with the company as part of subcontracting arrangements.

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 a clear strategy to provide high-quality training for apprentices and employers working in the digital economy. They have grown the provision at an appropriate pace to ensure that they have good resources and sufficient experience to provide apprentices with effective training. They have recruited tutors who have an up-to-date working knowledge of the digital technologies. These include object-orientated programming, software testing and computer networks. Leaders, managers and tutors rightly have a high level of credibility with employers.

Leaders, managers and tutors have developed strong partnerships with employers in delivering the provision. This has led to good support from employers. For example, they support apprentices to attend a well-structured six weeks off-the-job teaching, effective workplace coaching and regular progress review meetings.

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices meet fully the requirements for their programmes. As a result, apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and

behaviours that help them to work effectively with their employers. Employers are right to say that as a result of their training, apprentices develop good vocational skills. For example, apprentices work competently on networking and client and server computing systems.

Leaders are particularly careful to work only with employers who are committed to the training of apprentices. This has ensured that apprentices have the roles and gain the experience that they require for their apprenticeships. Managers offer apprentices a wide range of additional qualifications to increase their expertise for taking on extra responsibility. These include specialised qualifications in relational database management systems, graphic design software and internet security fundamentals.

Leaders and managers check carefully the attendance of apprentices on their planned training weeks. Apprentices who wish to repeat any specific topics receive encouragement from tutors to attend additional training sessions. This ensures that apprentices who require extra lessons receive them.

Leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the strengths of the provision and where they need to make improvements. Managers observe frequently the quality of teaching that apprentices receive. However, they do not evaluate sufficiently the impact of teaching practices on apprentices' learning and development. Consequently, tutors do not always receive enough advice on how to improve their practices.

Leaders and managers frequently collect employers' and apprentices' feedback about the provision. When they identify areas for improvements, they act quickly to resolve issues.

Leaders frequently debate and scrutinise the quality of the provision and apprentices' progress. They take effective actions when required. As a result, apprentices make their expected progress towards completion of their apprenticeship. However, leaders have not developed suitable quality assurance arrangements for the support and challenge that they require to ensure sustained development of the provision.

Managers have not developed good enough strategies to improve all apprentices' English and mathematical skills. As a result, apprentices who have achieved English and mathematics qualifications at the appropriate level do not develop these skills further.

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

Staff who recruit apprentices have a good understanding of the aptitudes and the interests that candidates require in order to be successful in their apprenticeships. For example, they advise candidates who enjoy marketing to take digital marketer apprenticeships. They advise candidates who enjoy computer programming to take

software development technician apprenticeships. As a result, most apprentices remain on their programmes.

Staff and tutors have a clear understanding of apprentices' knowledge, skills, aptitudes and interests at the start of their programmes. Most apprentices' programmes provide them with sufficient curriculum content and learning tasks for their development. However, tutors do not plan well enough to ensure that all apprentices achieve to their full potentials. Too often, tutors set the apprentices with more experience and those with less experience the same learning tasks to complete in the same time.

Apprentices gain a clear understanding of how to develop and use digital systems. During lessons, tutors use their knowledge and experience effectively to explain to apprentices concepts such as cloud computing technology. As a result, apprentices apply their learning quickly and effectively at work. For example, they take on important roles in installing software, liaising with colleagues in international departments and communicating with suppliers regarding issues with purchased technology equipment. However, tutors' questioning techniques require development. This is because they do not check the depth of understanding of all apprentices sufficiently well. Not all tutors provide apprentices with useful feedback on how to improve their work.

Tutors review apprentices' progress frequently and effectively. They ensure that apprentices are clear about how well they are doing. However, they do not explain enough, to apprentices and employers, about end-point assessments. They do not ensure that apprentices have ambitious targets for high grades in these assessments. Consequently, apprentices do not know what they need to do to achieve high grades.

Tutors do not focus on improving sufficiently apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Their feedback on apprentices' spelling and grammar is insufficient. Consequently, apprentices cannot learn from their mistakes in order to improve the quality of their written work.

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have developed detailed and effective policies to reduce risks to apprentices. These include risks from extremism and radicalisation. They have established effective links with Liverpool and Manchester safeguarding boards.

All staff have completed their safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. This training has contributed towards their clear understanding about their responsibilities in relation to apprentices' safety. Managers and tutors place a high importance on working safely online, such as when using social networking. Tutors' frequent checks of apprentices' knowledge and useful discussions about risks have led to most apprentices having a good grasp of safety. Apprentices have a reasonable understanding of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Managers ensure that staff have suitable checks before employing them. These include enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks. The designated safeguarding officer, who is a senior manager, has appropriate experience and training at the suitable level for his responsibility. The procedure for reporting incidents is clear. The designated officer maintains a clear record of safeguarding concerns and the actions that he has followed. The records indicate a good response in relation to apprentices' concerns, such as their mental health issues.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2018