

Aspire Development (UK) Ltd.

Monitoring visit report

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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 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.

Aspire Development (UK) Ltd. (Aspire) was founded by the current managing director in 2005. It specialises in the delivery of leadership and development training for employers of various sizes. It continues to deliver this type of training on a full-cost, commercially funded basis and, from May 2017, started to deliver levy-funded apprenticeships.

At the time of the monitoring visit, 265 apprentices were on standards-based apprenticeships. Aspire works with five levy-paying employers and three NHS Trusts to provide apprenticeship training for their employees. Around two thirds of apprentices are on team leader or supervisor apprenticeships at level 3. The remaining apprentices are on operations or departmental manager apprenticeships at level 5. Aspire 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 are highly responsive to employers' needs. They work closely with senior leaders and managers of employers to design apprenticeship programmes that meet employers' organisational development needs effectively. Leaders clarify with employers the principles and requirements of apprenticeship programmes. Employers are fully aware of their commitment to allow sufficient time away from work for apprentices to participate in off-the-job training. When, due to pressures of work, employers' managers do not release apprentices for planned training, leaders at Aspire deal with this promptly. They confirm with senior managers of the employer that they will ensure that apprentices receive the time they need.

Leaders have taken effective action to strengthen the procedures that they and employers use to select candidates for apprenticeship programmes. A few of the apprentices who joined the first cohorts in 2017 were not suitable or were not sufficiently motivated to complete their work. As a result, they left their programmes early. After recognising this weakness, leaders have ensured that the manager who

is responsible for the apprenticeship programme works closely with employers to review applications from employees and that programme leads take part in selection activities. As a result, selection procedures are now more thorough. Apprentices who join the programme must demonstrate a commitment to participate in the learning activities and complete the work required. Programme leads use the selection process effectively. They ensure that apprentices are recent appointees to new roles at a higher level in their business, or that apprentices join programmes to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they need to progress to roles with a higher level of responsibility.

Programme leads and senior leaders provide employers with detailed information about the progress that apprentices make. They highlight quickly any concerns that they have. They work closely with employers to agree actions to resolve concerns, such as identifying additional training or support for apprentices.

Leaders manage the planned growth of the provision effectively. They have increased the number of programme leads to meet this growth, ensuring that they recruit appropriately qualified and experienced individuals.

Leaders self-assess the effectiveness of their apprenticeships accurately. They use their findings to put appropriate actions in place to bring about improvements to weaker aspects of the provision. For example, they are taking action to improve the recording of progress reviews after they recognised that programme leads were not doing this consistently well.

Through self-assessment, leaders recognise that the arrangements to enable apprentices to achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics are not effective. They have put a range of actions in place to bring about improvements. These include the appointment of a manager to coordinate the planning and delivery of functional skills provision. They are also recruiting specialist functional skills delivery staff to provide training and one-to-one support for apprentices. Leaders are right to recognise that this remains a key priority for improvement. Apprentices make good progress in developing new vocational and professional skills and knowledge. Apprentices who have not already achieved qualifications at level 2 or higher in English and mathematics, however, make slow progress in these subjects during their apprenticeship.

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

Programme leads work closely with employers to ensure that only those employees in appropriate job roles, or those identified as having the potential to be future leaders, become apprentices. Assisted by programme leads, apprentices new to the programme carry out a self-evaluation of their existing skills, based on the apprenticeship standards. Through the early stages of the apprenticeship,

programme leads use a variety of activities, often related to planned learning, that establish apprentices' existing levels of skill thoroughly. However, programme leads do not draw these different sources of information together, or evaluate them as a whole, quickly enough. As a result, programme leads and apprentices do not develop training plans that relate specifically to their individual circumstances early enough in the programme. Apprentices who have an additional support need receive the help that they need to participate in learning and make the progress of which they are capable.

Aspire's leaders and programme leads liaise effectively with employers to design programmes that match apprentices' work situations. Employers' senior leaders deliver aspects of apprentices' programmes. They ground apprentices' training firmly within the context and values of the business. Apprentices at both level 3 and level 5 must complete a challenging business improvement project related specifically to their leadership and management role. They present their proposals to senior managers, who challenge them about the business impact and improvements that they hope to achieve. After implementing their plans, they present the results to managers. They identify the benefits gained and their personal and organisational learning points. Through completing the project and delivering presentations to senior managers, apprentices improve their confidence and their effectiveness as team leaders or departmental managers. In addition, they develop important skills in problem-solving, critical evaluation and self-reflection.

Programme leads are well-qualified and experienced in the subjects that they teach. They use their experience well to plan learning activities and projects that apprentices find interesting and challenging. Consequently, apprentices make good progress in acquiring new skills and knowledge and develop good attitudes to learning. They value the improvements that they make to their personal and work-related effectiveness.

Apprentices take part in frequent one-to-one conversations with their programme leads about their progress on the apprenticeship and any problems that they experience. Through effective coaching provided by programme leads, apprentices reflect on, and evaluate the benefits of, the new skills and knowledge that they gain. During these conversations, they agree the actions that they need to take to make progress and overcome any personal and work-related barriers that they experience. However, too often programme leads do not record the key points of these discussions or the actions agreed. As a result, it is unclear that reviews of apprentices' progress and actions agreed with apprentices cover all aspects of the apprenticeship standard, such as functional skills. Although programme leads communicate effectively with employers' senior managers, they do not routinely include apprentices' direct line managers in reviews of apprentices' progress.

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. They have established effective arrangements to safeguard apprentices. Leaders ensure that programme leads promote this culture effectively through learning activities. They do this in the context of working safely and responsibly. They also focus on the positive benefits to apprentices and other team members of good health and well-being in work and everyday life. They emphasise the importance of respecting and valuing differences in people.

The head of quality and standards is the designated safeguarding lead, and one of the directors acts as deputy. Both have completed appropriate training for the role. The deputy has gained significant experience in the safeguarding of children and has undertaken extensive additional safeguarding training. She uses this expertise well to advise on the development of clear and appropriate policies, procedures and practices that managers communicate well to staff. Staff have a good understanding of their rights and obligations. However, the process that staff should follow if they have safeguarding concerns about the actions of other members of staff or managers is unclear.

The designated lead keeps up-to-date records showing that all staff have appropriate checks to confirm their suitability for working in a training role with adults. The records also confirm that staff have completed safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty.

Procedures for reporting safeguarding concerns about apprentices are clear, and staff understand how to use them. The designated lead has set up a confidential log to record the actions taken and outcomes of any concerns raised. However, no one has raised any formal concerns to date.

During apprentices' inductions to their programmes, programme leads refer only very briefly to safeguarding and the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Once they have started their programme, all apprentices attend a day session, which covers safeguarding and British values in detail. Programme leads relate these topics very effectively to the context of apprentices' workplaces and the teams and individuals with whom they work. Through these sessions, apprentices develop a good understanding about how these subjects relate to their work and everyday lives. In some cases, programme leads do not schedule these sessions until apprentices have spent a month or more on the programme. Leaders are right to recognise that they need to ensure that they raise apprentices' awareness about safeguarding sooner. They are also correct to realise that they should increase apprentices' awareness about recognising and protecting themselves and others from the risks of radicalisation and extremism earlier in their programmes.

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