

Kreston Reeves LLP

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Mark Shackleton, Her Majesty's Inspector

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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 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.

Kreston Reeves LLP has offices throughout the South East of England and provides accountancy and business services throughout the region. New employees are selected carefully to become trainees without apprenticeships or they are enrolled on a higher or Level 7 standards-based apprenticeship. At the time of the monitoring visit, 16 apprentices were at various stages of an 18-month, professional accountancy and taxation technicians standards-based higher apprenticeship.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Human resources staff assess accurately all new employees and offer successful candidates a range of training routes to become qualified accounting technicians or accountants and for many to achieve chartered status. Managers have recently decided to place most new entrants on a combined programme that will enable them to move through a higher apprenticeship to a Level 7 apprenticeship in around 54 months. They will, however, continue to recruit small numbers to the higher apprenticeship programme as a potential stepping-stone to Level 7 and chartered status.

In addition to the technical training provided in colleges or by college staff in the high-quality, centrally located Kreston Reeves training venue, apprentices benefit from very extensive internal off-the-job training. For example, this includes ethics training and extending apprentices' skills and confidence in using spreadsheets efficiently to record and analyse financial data. This training is highly effective when carried out as one-to-one coaching or in small groups, but managers need to support coaching staff in developing their teaching skills for whole-group training.

Managers have a very good understanding of their apprentices' progress and know whether they are heading towards a pass or distinction. Apprentices also know how

well they are doing but managers do not formally agree what apprentices are on track to achieve early enough in their programmes to motivate them to make the maximum possible progress.

Managers monitor the subcontracted accountancy colleges who provide the training and revision courses effectively. These long-established arrangements have supported high qualification achievement rates. Where managers have not been happy with the training provided they have stopped using the college concerned.

People managers, who strongly support apprentices' skills, knowledge and behaviours development, are qualified and experienced chartered accountants or accounting technicians. They review and provide feedback on their apprentices' progress frequently as they complete work engagements and hold quarterly formal progress reviews. Managers have plans to supplement internal assessor training with courses that lead to qualifications to improve further the people managers' training and assessment practice.

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

Apprentices rapidly develop the substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that managers need them to have. For example, apprentices gain strong technical skills alongside much improved confidence in their own abilities to complete audit work and to professionally interact with clients. They receive valuable tuition and support from tutors during their off-the-job technical training and revision modules and the support provided by their 'buddies', mentors and people managers.

Apprentices are confident and ambitious. They can identify a wide range of new knowledge and skills that they have rapidly developed during their programmes which has significantly improved their confidence and professional competence. For example, apprentices improved rapidly their confidence and ability to deliver high-quality, technically accurate presentations to clients. They benefit greatly from the training and support they receive from college tutors, who provide the technical training to prepare them for examinations, and from the managers they work for on different engagements to help them apply this knowledge.

The quality of the extensive off-the-job training is high, and managers frequently observe learning activities and receive feedback from tutors, apprentices and managers on the quality of the provision. Existing plans to train managers more formally in identifying the quality of teaching, learning and assessment achieved in the wide-range of learning activities will improve the impact of their observations on supporting improvement.

Managers monitor progress effectively and all 16 current Level 4 apprentices are making at least expected progress toward their end-point assessment. Apprentices' work in their portfolios is of an appropriate standard, although no apprentices have yet gone through end-point assessment. Managers have planned extensive support to ensure the first two apprentices approaching the gateway, prior to end-point assessment, are well prepared.

Apprentices rapidly develop the mathematical and information technology skills they need to succeed. Support to help them improve their English skills is less well developed. Although managers do review and adjust apprentices' draft letters, and give feedback on the content of emails, they do not provide formal support to help apprentices avoid similar errors in future written work. This requires improvement.

Managers monitor apprentices' progress effectively. They take appropriate action to support the very few apprentices whose progress is too slow. In one case, managers have extended an apprentice's programme appropriately, having identified a need for the apprentice to spend a period focusing on other matters.

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

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Partners and directors have ensured that appropriate safeguarding policies and arrangements are in place. These policies include suitable arrangements for safeguarding any apprentices who are under the age of 18, should they recruit any in the future. Managers continually review and update policies. For example, in response to feedback, they make it a requirement that apprentices who must travel long distances for training courses are accommodated for the night before a course begins.

The human resources (HR) director is appropriately trained as the company safeguarding officer. The training manager, who manages the apprenticeship programmes, is part of the HR team and is kept well informed and acts upon any welfare or safeguarding concerns that affect apprentices. Plans for the training manager to be trained as the deputy safeguarding officer will further strengthen the arrangements for safeguarding.

Apprentices have a basic awareness of British values and of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. This awareness needs to be developed to enable them to understand these dangers and their link to British values. Managers recognise this and are developing plans to expand the ethics package and the online safety training during induction to achieve the required improvements.

Managers ensure that apprentices always visit clients as part of a team, which helps ensure their welfare and safety.

Partners and directors have recently introduced 'well-being champions' and this has improved staff awareness of the support that is available should a range of issues arise. This includes good support for mental health issues and guidance and support to help staff achieve a good work–life balance.

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