

LDN Apprenticeships Ltd

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 the Education and Skills Funding Agency (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.

LDN Apprenticeships Ltd (LDN), previously known as Future LDN Ltd, was set up in 2010 and began providing apprenticeship training as a subcontractor in 2011. In May 2017 it gained a direct contract to provide apprenticeship training funded by the apprenticeship levy. It continues to provide training as a subcontractor. At the time of this visit, 48 apprentices were directly funded by the levy. Of these, 44 were on apprenticeships at level 3 or 4 in information and communication technology (ICT). The remaining four apprentices were on apprenticeships at level 4 in business administration and law. Eleven of the 48 apprenticeships were standards-based.

Themes

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

Significant progress

The chief executive has a clear strategy for provision aimed at preparing apprentices well for learning and employment. Leaders and managers pay careful attention to enabling young people to gain employment in roles and with organisations to which they might not otherwise have had access. Leaders' clear values and high expectations are well understood by staff and employers.

Leaders and managers have developed exacting recruitment and selection processes to ensure that apprentices are ready for learning and are placed with the most appropriate employers. Selection and subsequent induction sessions are imaginative and demanding of candidates and employers, for example requiring each to give very brief presentations about themselves or their organisations. These processes are particularly effective in preparing candidates for their apprenticeships and ensuring that employers understand their roles in developing and supporting apprentices. Employers and apprentices value the process because it helps match apprentices to employment so successfully.

Managers monitor apprentices' progress closely. They use progress tracking systems and frequent discussions with LDN's learning and development specialists (LDSs) to identify apprentices at risk of falling behind or leaving. Managers and LDSs take prompt and effective action to improve apprentices' progress and ensure that they succeed. In 2017/18, seven of the eight apprentices who were expected to complete that year did so within the planned time. In the current year, LDN's data shows that the proportion of apprentices who have completed on time is high with a further 15 apprentices still in learning. Almost all of these are making good progress and are expected to complete on time. The proportion of apprentices who leave without completing their apprenticeships is low. Almost all these leavers move to other jobs.

Leaders at LDN have established strong links with most of their employers and are demanding of them in the development of their apprentices. Managers and LDSs make effective use of apprentices' reflective logs and progress reviews to ensure that apprentices are trained at work and get sufficient time away from work for further study. Employers contribute particularly effectively to apprentices' learning so that they develop the skills and behaviours needed at work. Managers have ceased working with employers who do not provide enough training and support for their apprentices and have placed these apprentices with more suitable employers.

Managers have effective systems for identifying apprentices' additional learning or support needs at their recruitment and for arranging suitable support. Managers are prompt and assiduous in providing support to help apprentices remain on programme if additional needs arise during their training. They make good use of their links with external specialist support agencies; for example, arranging timely counselling for apprentices who need it. Managers' interventions are successful in enabling apprentices to complete their training and gain permanent employment.

LDN's board of non-executive directors provides strong support and challenge for leaders. The board's chairman meets frequently with the chief executive to help develop LDN's strategy and challenge leaders to explore ways of providing apprenticeships that enable more employers to participate. The board meets regularly and holds leaders to account by reviewing the extent to which key performance indicators have been met and why, or by following up actions to support apprentices at risk.

Leaders and managers know their provision and its strengths and areas for improvement well. They make good use of a range of data, observations of key aspects of training such as workshop sessions and reviews, feedback from apprentices and employers and discussions with staff to evaluate the programmes they offer and make improvements. Their self-assessment report is detailed and thorough, as is the associated quality improvement plan.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Significant progress

Leaders and managers have well-structured schemes of work. They plan learning well so that apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours to equip them for their jobs. For example, apprentices working for a well-known film company quickly develop the digital skills they need to edit advertisements on film trailers. Business administration apprentices learn how to plan and coordinate events and ensure that the correct security measures are in place. Apprentices write detailed reflective logs in which they identify clearly the skills they have developed and improved and the knowledge they have gained.

LDSs use their subject knowledge well to motivate apprentices and make learning enjoyable. In workshop sessions and progress reviews, LDSs make good use of questions, exercises and activities to introduce new topics, assess learning and deepen apprentices' understanding. LDSs make clear links between practical activities in workshops and the concepts they support. They are careful to ensure that all apprentices contribute to, and learn from, discussions. During exercises and activities LDSs use time effectively to assess apprentices' knowledge and understanding. Apprentices can make clear links between their off-the-job learning and their work. However, in a small number of instances, activities are too generic for apprentices' specific job roles in finance.

LDSs and employers successfully develop apprentices' understanding of the behaviours required in a professional working environment. Apprentices can make clear links between the values promoted by LDN and the behaviours expected of them at work. They cite the importance of being enthusiastic and willing to accept feedback as key attributes in their progress. Apprentices feel proud to work at their employers. They value their training and say that their maturity, confidence and professionalism at work have improved as a result. They have high expectations for their success on the programme and almost all are making good progress.

Most apprentices join with the required qualifications in English, mathematics. Those who need further study in these subjects attend workshops and individual sessions at an early stage in their apprenticeships. LDSs pay careful attention to developing apprentices' English and mathematics skills in workshop sessions, during reviews and when marking assignments. Apprentices say that their use of English in emails, or of mathematics in financial forecasting and budgeting, at work has improved. Almost all apprentices pass their English and ICT qualifications at the first attempt. However, too many apprentices fail to gain their mathematics qualification at the first attempt.

LDSs carry out regular and frequent progress reviews with apprentices and use them to cover a wide range of topics. LDSs make effective use of these reviews to help apprentices understand the progress they have made and to set relevant targets and actions to improve apprentices' skills, knowledge and behaviours. LDSs make clear links between apprentices' work and their off-the-job training so that apprentices can apply their learning. However, in a small number of instances LDSs move from one topic to another in the review without ensuring that learning is consolidated.

Most apprentices complete their assignments to a high standard. They develop valuable skills in structuring their written work and in planning projects. Apprentices use surveys and spreadsheets well in their research. They illustrate their written work effectively with flow charts and diagrams. In most cases, LDSs give apprentices useful feedback on their work to help them improve their standard of English or the required level of detail. However, in a small number of instances, LDSs' feedback is limited to brief praise with insufficient information on what has been done well and why.

Managers at LDN and employers give apprentices detailed information about the training and career opportunities available to them as part of their apprenticeship and on its completion. Apprentices are clear about these progression routes. Almost all are retained in permanent employment by their employers at the end of their apprenticeships. Many are given greater responsibility and a higher rate of pay.

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

Leaders and managers have well-established safeguarding arrangements. They pay careful attention to safer recruitment processes to ensure that staff are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Managers refresh and update staff understanding frequently and regularly. LDN's designated safeguarding lead is well trained and knowledgeable, with a good understanding of generic safeguarding matters and those that are more locally specific.

LDSs introduce safeguarding concepts to apprentices at recruitment and continue to develop apprentices' understanding during their induction, training and reviews. Managers and LDSs reinforce apprentices' understanding regularly with messages and at reviews. For example, apprentices were alerted to take extra care in travel to the centre following a stabbing incident near the local tube station. During reviews LDSs make effective use of relevant local news stories to reinforce apprentices' understanding of safeguarding and the dangers of radicalisation or extremism. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe and feel that LDN staff pay careful attention to their safety and well-being.

Managers at LDN have a detailed safeguarding policy with good guidance on the action they should take if a concern is identified. They have particularly effective and beneficial links to external referral agencies and use these and their procedures well to take action when safeguarding or radicalisation concerns arise. As a result, they have been successful in supporting apprentices at risk.

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