

Well Associates Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Richard Deane, 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 themes set out below.

Founded in 2010, Well Associates Limited is an independent training provider based in the West Midlands. The provider began apprenticeship delivery in May 2017. The apprenticeships are at mostly level 3 and level 5 in leadership and management and are standards-based apprenticeships. At the time of the visit there were 11 apprentices, mostly following level 3 apprenticeships in team leading. The provider does not subcontract any elements of apprenticeship provision.

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 strategic intent to extend their apprenticeship provision and to become the preferred provider for organisations in the leisure and education sectors in the region. They aim to help businesses thrive by improving their employees' leadership and management and customer service skills. Leaders have planned their curriculum carefully to ensure that apprentices develop the specific skills employers expect. Consequently, apprentices improve the productivity of the visitor attractions and education services that they manage.

Leaders have ensured that the curriculum enables apprentices to meet in full the requirements of the apprenticeship standards. They have included a range of additional qualifications, including coaching, neurolinguistic programming and a management diploma, to develop apprentices' skills further. However, leaders accept that they have been slow to ensure that apprentices are fully aware of all aspects of the apprenticeship end-point assessment. As a result, a minority of apprentices do not have sufficiently specific targets to help them achieve higher grades.

Leaders developed the apprenticeship provision cautiously to ensure that all systems and processes were in place before increasing apprenticeship numbers. They monitor closely apprentices' progress towards completing the main elements of the apprenticeship. Consequently, leaders have sufficient oversight of apprentices' overall achievement and progress. They use this information to identify quickly

apprentices who are falling behind in their studies and provide them with the appropriate support to help them get back on track with their studies. However, they do not monitor sufficiently apprentices' progress from their starting points to ensure that all apprentices achieve their potential. Additionally, the line managers of a few apprentices do not contribute routinely to their progress reviews, limiting the scope and detail of the feedback they receive on their performance.

Senior leaders and employers have a clear understanding of the requirements of on- and off-the-job training and ensure that most apprentices receive their entitlement. However, in a few cases, due to staff shortages, apprentices are not always able to complete their studies at work. They study in their own time. Senior leaders intervene with employers swiftly to ensure that they provide apprentices with their off-the-job training.

Senior leaders ensure that trainers are appropriately qualified and experienced to support apprentices well. This includes relevant careers information, advice, and guidance (CIAG) qualifications. The senior leader responsible for CIAG is currently undertaking a level 6 qualification in this area. Senior leaders monitor carefully the guidance apprentices receive to ensure that they are clear about their next steps and future careers.

Leaders work closely with their existing employers to help them identify the most appropriate candidates for their apprenticeship vacancies. Apprentices receive the appropriate guidance and initial skills assessment to ensure that they are on the right course at the right level. Consequently, apprentices develop new skills that benefit them in their role and help them to move on in their careers. Leaders survey apprentices' career intentions and monitor closely their next steps. They use this information well to improve their provision and the advice and guidance given to new candidates.

Leaders' self-assessment of their provision is broadly accurate, identifying key strengths and areas for improvement. Their actions to improve the quality of provision are appropriate. However, leaders have yet to summarise and assess fully the impact of these actions. Additionally, managers' actions to improve teaching and learning are not sufficiently precise to ensure that all apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

Employers benefit from the contribution apprentices make to their businesses, and in particular the management skills necessary to operate attractions efficiently and successfully. Most apprentices who complete their courses achieve in the time allocated and move on into full-time employment. For the few apprentices leaving their course early, most continue in their current role.

Most apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills. However, those apprentices who already hold the requisite qualifications in these subjects do not receive a sufficiently detailed initial assessment of their skills. As a result, trainers do not have sufficient information of apprentices' starting points to set specific targets to help apprentices improve identified weaknesses.

Leaders accept that governance arrangements are not sufficiently well-developed. They have recently formed an independent board to scrutinise their actions and

provide them with the appropriate challenge to hold them to account. It is too soon to judge the impact of the new board.

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

Leaders and trainers structure and plan the curriculum effectively to ensure that apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills in their employers' business. As a result, most apprentices have developed their management skills and improved the performance of their teams. For example, training manager apprentices have increased the proportion of their trainees completing and achieving their training courses.

Leaders ensure that apprentices' off-the-job training relates well to the workplace. Trainers ensure that sessions are well-planned and include an engaging variety of teaching and learning activities, such as case studies, role play and peer review. Apprentices enjoy their learning and can apply theory into practice. For example, apprentices on team-leading apprenticeships successfully applied neurolinguistic programming and coaching skills in their role, improving the communication within their team.

Apprentices demonstrate clearly how their apprenticeship programme has improved their workplace behaviours. For example, apprentices explain changes in their demeanour and becoming more professional in their presentation and their communications with colleagues and customers. However, trainers do not use information about apprentices' starting points, especially in relation to their behaviours. As a result, trainers do not set apprentices sufficiently specific targets to ensure that they are able to achieve the highest grades during their end-point assessment.

Trainers monitor apprentices' progress effectively. Apprentices benefit greatly from one-to-one coaching sessions where they discuss the application of their new skills in the workplace and their progress overall. Apprentices welcome the feedback from trainers that helps them improve the quality of written assignments and devise new management strategies at work. Expert trainers provide apprentices with good advice and practical tips to help them understand key management theories, such as Myers Briggs personality tests. As a result, the quality of apprentices' work is of a high standard and clearly illustrates their ability to apply theory into practice.

Apprentices develop their English, mathematics, and digital skills well. Apprentices improve their report writing for different purposes. They also become more confident and able to give instructions more clearly to their teams. Apprentices extend their mathematics skills through applying financial measures during project management activities. They also hone their digital skills by using online shared folders and electronic communication tools to complete their work with their coach.

Leaders and trainers provide apprentices with appropriate support for their end-point assessment. Apprentices benefit from 'coaching days' that help them to revise for

external tests, presentations and discussions. They receive effective one-to-one support following mock assessments to help improve their performance. However, feedback from a few apprentices' line managers is not sufficiently specific to help them to achieve the grades of which they are capable.

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

Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders have developed a positive safeguarding culture and have developed good links with the local Wolverhampton safeguarding board, multi-agency safeguarding hub and the police. The provider's staff, including the designated safeguarding lead, hold appropriate safeguarding qualifications. Trainers receive the appropriate training to understand current threats in the local community. This includes update training on the 'Prevent' duty, and topics such as county lines and the activity of gangs.

Staff have a good understanding of safeguarding and their responsibility to safeguard their apprentices. Leaders monitor routinely safeguarding concerns and ensure that apprentices have received the appropriate training to protect themselves from potential harm.

Safeguarding policies describe well the expectations of the provider and refer to the most recent government legislation. Managers ensure that all apprentices work in safe and secure environments and routinely monitor their safety. Apprentices benefit from access to a range of agencies to support their individual needs, including mental health services.

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