

First Intuition Bristol Limited

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 themes set out below.

First Intuition Bristol Limited (First Intuition) is a small independent learning provider and a member of the First Intuition Group. The Bristol centre gained approval as a levy-funded apprenticeship provider in May 2017. The first apprentices were enrolled in September 2017. At the time of the monitoring visit, 28 apprentices were studying standards-based apprenticeships in accountancy and finance. Three quarters of these were working at level 4 and the remainder at level 3. Around one third of these apprentices were in the 16 to 18 age group and the remainder were aged 19 and over. Around 115 apprentices are following level 7 accountancy apprenticeships but these were not in scope for this monitoring visit.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders, managers and staff plan and provide a broad range of accountancy training programmes. These meet the standards and requirements of employers, employees and the accountancy profession. In particular, they offer high-quality, well-structured apprenticeship programmes which advance apprentices' careers so that they become valued and productive employees.

First Intuition's leaders maintain strong working partnerships with a wide range of accountancy companies in the south west of England. Employers have a high regard for the quality of the organisation's training and its staff. Employers value the knowledge, skills and behaviours their apprentices gain.

All apprentices are selected and recruited to their programmes with integrity. Most have little or no prior employment history and join their employer after gaining A-levels. Leaders ensure that their initial assessment is thorough. All apprentices are employed and placed in roles which provide them with good opportunities for

learning and development. Leaders ensure that apprentices receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training during working hours.

Leaders have developed good resources for apprentices' training and learning. Apprentices have access to well-equipped training rooms and online learning materials. Apprentices make good use of these to support their learning and to communicate with their skills and development coaches. Coaches, trainers, and support staff are well qualified and experienced. They use their expertise effectively to provide apprentices with current professional insight and meaningful training. All staff have good opportunities for professional development to maintain and extend their competencies.

Leaders recognise clearly what they do well and what they need to do better. They use a detailed quality improvement plan to focus and record their actions to improve, but this is not based on a comprehensive formal assessment of strengths and weaknesses. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of the apprenticeship programmes and apprentices' progress regularly but use only a narrow range of management information to do so.

Leaders recognise that, as the provision grows, the largely informal approach they use to manage and develop the provision is no longer sufficient. They acknowledge correctly that it does not ensure that all staff are consistent in their approaches to training and support for apprentices.

All leaders are actively involved in training. They have not until very recently devoted sufficient time to implement formal quality improvement or effective governance arrangements. However, leaders now make good use of an external consultant to provide an overview of the quality and effectiveness of the provision. They have quickly implemented new formal methods for oversight and delivery of the programmes. Almost all these arrangements are at a very early stage of implementation and their impact cannot be assessed.

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' pass rates in the examinations which form a progressive and key part of achieving their apprenticeship are very high. The great majority of apprentices are making good progress in their studies and increasingly become very effective employees. Apprentices and employers have a good understanding of the requirements of apprenticeships. Apprentices and their managers have effective channels to voice their views through completing regular surveys on teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders take good account of these surveys to implement changes and improvements to the provision. Employers value apprentices' contributions to their business. Apprentices have been promoted or given additional responsibilities during and after completing their apprenticeship programme.

Apprentices benefit from effective classroom-based, off-the-job training sessions run by First Intuition trainers and further training arranged by their employer. Apprentices' on- and off-the-job training supports the development of their knowledge, skills, behaviours and careers very effectively. Apprentices' off-the-job training includes workshops in team-building and leadership and additional online learning modules such as identifying and reporting money laundering, anti-bribery, software training and the use of plain English. Apprentices prepare successfully for their end-point assessments, although very few have so far completed this part of their apprenticeship.

Apprentices enjoy being active team members in small- and large-scale professional accountancy companies. They articulate clearly what they have learned and now put into practice at work. For example, most apprentices learn basic bookkeeping tasks, how to complete value-added tax (VAT) returns, prepare bank reconciliation statements and compile draft accounts under supervision. Employers provide more challenging work for apprentices as their expertise develops.

Apprentices' self-confidence grows as their professional skills develop. They become more proficient at communicating directly and indirectly with clients and colleagues. Most improve their business English knowledge, and their skills improve as they are given responsibility for writing and sending letters and emails to clients. However, a small minority of apprentices with lower-level functional English do not receive sufficient support to develop these skills further.

Coaches involve employers closely and routinely in regular apprentice reviews. Apprentices' progress is monitored and reviewed thoroughly. Coaches and employers work closely together to ensure apprentices have good opportunities to complete all aspects of their programmes to a high standard.

Coaches and trainers prepare apprentices fully for formal assessments. Apprentices receive effective feedback on their progress and most know what they need to do to improve. Coaches set apprentices targets to help them understand what they need to do and by when. However, shorter-term targets are not routinely specific enough. Coaches are quick to identify apprentices who are at risk of falling behind in their studies. Coaches work closely with subject tutors to ensure that apprentices with additional learning needs, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, receive appropriate support.

Most apprentices have carefully considered and realistic career goals. Coaches and employers provide them with effective information, advice and guidance on relevant career paths and qualifications. However, just under a fifth of the apprentices have left early. The majority of these are in the 16 to 18 age group. Leaders appreciate correctly that their approach to the recruitment of younger apprentices needs to be reviewed and revised to improve retention.

Leaders' current arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment do not enable them to evaluate the quality of these aspects adequately.

Leaders' and peers' observations focus on identifying and recording what happens during a training session or review. They do not evaluate how effectively apprentices are learning and developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

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

Leaders have implemented appropriate and effective arrangements to safeguard apprentices. Leaders place a high a priority on ensuring that apprentices' safety at work and during training is maintained at all times. Leaders follow safer recruitment procedures and ensure that appropriate background and reference checks are made and reviewed on all staff.

All staff have received appropriate and regular training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values. As a result, most staff have a very good understanding of how to safeguard apprentices. They know how and when to pass on concerns about apprentices to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL has received enhanced training for the role. Leaders recognise that further growth in the provision means that at least one deputy DSL will need to be appointed in the near future.

Coaches are very well aware that safeguarding is an integral element of their duty of care and support for all apprentices. Coaches identify and support apprentices' well-being and mental health very successfully as formal records of concern show.

Apprentices are introduced to safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values from initial contact with First Intuition staff, during induction and as part of their regular progress reviews. They know how to keep themselves safe online and how to report concerns at their workplaces and through First Intuition. A very small minority of apprentices do not have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism in the wider society. Coaches do not all have the confidence to discuss and fully explore aspects such as radicalisation and extremism during reviews in ways that reflect apprentices' wider experience of the world. Leaders are in the early stages of implementing a 'Prevent' risk assessment and launching a policy to cover the very small number of apprentices under the age of 18.

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