Staffordshire University

Further education in higher education

Inspection dates	14–17 May 2019

Overall effectiveness			**Requires improvement**
Effectiveness of leadership and management	**Requires improvement**	Apprenticeships	**Requires improvement**
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	**Requires improvement**		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	**Good**		
Outcomes for learners	**Requires improvement**		

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Managers' evaluation of the quality of provision is not sufficiently accurate. They have been slow to identify issues and take remedial actions to improve management and information technology apprenticeships.

- Leaders do not monitor sufficiently apprentices' progress from their starting points. They not have enough information to ensure that lecturers plan effectively management and IT apprentices' work so that they can achieve their potential.

- Too few management and IT apprentices achieve their qualifications in the time allocated.

- Too few apprentices receive routinely high-quality reviews of their progress in the workplace to ensure that they make the progress of which they are capable.

- Too few management and IT apprentices demonstrate a deep enough understanding of diversity and of British values in the workplace and society.

- The information governors receive in relation to apprentices' performance and standards is not helpful enough for them to understand clearly apprentices' starting points, so they can hold senior leaders fully to account.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders and managers ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the local community and regional businesses very well, equipping apprentices with the vocational and technical skills required by employers.

- Nursing associates benefit from effective coaching and support from clinical specialists in the workplace. As a result, they develop quickly the necessary skills for them to provide effective care for their patients.

- The large majority of apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that help them work productively in the workplace.

- Apprentices receive effective support from specialist services that helps them to settle quickly into their studies and improve their academic writing skills.

- Most apprentices who study health-related apprenticeships achieve their qualifications in the time allocated.

Full report

Information about the provider

■ Staffordshire University is an established higher education provider with 15,000 students studying on campuses in Stoke-on-Trent, Stafford and Shrewsbury. The university began direct delivery of higher apprenticeships in 2016. It provides around 400 apprenticeships from level 5 to degree level in a range of subject areas. About half of all apprentices study at level 5. Of these, around 75% follow healthcare assistant practitioner and nurse associate apprenticeship standards. The remaining apprentices undertake mostly level 5 operations/department manager standards, or the software developer/network engineer standards. A few apprentices follow the level 5 assistant practitioner framework and level 4 information technology (IT), software, web and telecoms framework. Apprentices working above level 5 are not in scope for inspection by Ofsted.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

■ Leaders must ensure that:
  – recently developed systems and processes provide them with sufficient information, including on apprentices' starting points, to make sure that all apprentices achieve their potential
  – they use the information of apprentices' progress from management information, apprentices' reviews, and apprentices' and employers' feedback to ensure rapid progress towards achieving their improvement actions
  – all apprentices receive sufficient and helpful workplace reviews of their progress, including challenging targets so that they know how to achieve the highest grades during end-point assessments
  – lecturers plan management and IT apprentices' work to ensure that they are able to achieve their potential.

■ Lecturers and workplace mentors must ensure that all apprentices improve their understanding of diversity and of British values to help them work and relate effectively with others in their roles and communities.

■ Ensure that reports to governors accurately evaluate the quality of all aspects of apprenticeship provision – including the extent to which apprentices make progress from their starting points – to help governors hold leaders fully to account.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement

- Leaders are ambitious and have extensive plans to grow higher apprenticeship provision in the region. Their ambition, however, has yet to result in consistently good performance and learning experiences for all apprentices. Leaders have taken action to improve learning, assessment and outcomes for apprentices, but it is too soon to judge their effectiveness in raising apprenticeship standards consistently.

- Leaders and managers do not use information about apprentices' progress incisively to evaluate the impact of their actions and identify further improvements. This limits their understanding and ability to support improvement. For example, leaders and heads of school cannot view easily reports on apprentices' progress from their starting points or the proportion on track to complete within the time allocated.

- The university's most recent self-assessment is insufficiently evaluative. Senior leaders' self-assessment of their performance does not identify accurately all weaknesses and specifies only broad areas for improvement. Senior leaders have yet to develop sufficiently precise targets to enable them to monitor closely enough the effectiveness of the apprenticeship programme. Leaders and managers are therefore unable to monitor fully the extent to which their actions result in improving apprentices' outcomes. For example, leaders have been slow to ensure that all management apprentices make the progress that they should.

- Leaders and governors communicate their ambitions and intentions very well. The vice chancellor, governors and senior leaders provide influential strategic leadership and have a clear vision to meet the needs of students, apprentices and employers across Staffordshire. The university's academic strategy, 'connected curriculum continuum', is an effective initiative, establishing a clear mandate to equip students and apprentices with the skills to be both 'work-ready' and 'digitally-enabled'. Managers and staff at every level of the institution are clear about the direction and they fully support the vision of the university.

- Senior leaders and managers work closely with local learning organisations, employers and key stakeholders, including the local enterprise partnership, to develop higher- and degree-level apprenticeship pathways and resources. Leaders and managers have designed an appropriate curriculum to help communities and employers in the region to gain the skills necessary for future prosperity, while increasing social mobility in the region. These relationships have led to significant investment to enhance resources for apprentices. For example, they have established a new 'Apprenticeships and Digital Skills Hub' and, in nursing, a new state-of-the-art clinical simulation suite.

- Heads of school have an accurate understanding of the quality of the teaching delivered on-site at the university. Experienced practitioners who observe teaching, learning and assessment are suitably trained. As a result, they focus effectively on the quality of learning and make accurate judgements. However, observers fail to evaluate the quality of teaching and assessment in the workplace. Consequently, leaders do not have a sufficiently wide evaluation of the apprentices' experience to assure the quality of provision overall.

- Leaders and managers have developed a clear strategy to support and inspire apprentices

to develop their mathematics and English skills. Managers now place increased focus on the planning and provision of English and mathematics to support apprentices. An increasing proportion of apprentices benefit from the 'Step Up to Higher Education' programme and improve their mathematical, academic writing, referencing and critical-thinking skills.

■ Leaders manage subcontracting arrangements appropriately. They consider carefully with which providers to engage. The volume of subcontracted provision is now much reduced, with only a few apprentices remaining who are due to complete imminently.

The governance of the provider

■ Governors know the university and its context thoroughly. They provide effective strategic support to the executive team and have a clear vision for the future of the institution. They are strong advocates of widening participation and of the contribution to regional education and skills development.

■ Governors have a broad range of relevant expertise from commercial and education sectors to aid their understanding of institutional performance and key areas for improvement. However, the information they receive in relation to apprentices' performance and standards is not sufficiently helpful for them to ask the right questions and hold senior leaders fully to account. For example, they do not receive sufficient information to be able to challenge the extent to which apprentices make sufficient progress based on their starting points.

■ Governors make effective use of their links with curriculum areas and the student representation on the board to deepen their understanding of apprentices' experiences, so that they can provide support and challenge to senior leaders. As a result, leaders and managers have recently improved significantly the resources and systems to support apprentices.

Safeguarding

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

■ The university has suitable policies and procedures in place to identify and support apprentices at risk of harm. Key staff with strategic responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained and have benefited from further courses to extend their understanding of multi-agency working practices.

■ Leaders maintain effective links with relevant agencies to help assure the well-being of apprentices at the university and in the workplace.

■ All staff are recruited and vetted suitably, and the central register is accurate and up to date.

■ Apprentices and lecturers have easy access to systems to report any concerns that they have. As a result, leaders and managers are alert to any concerns about apprentices' safety.

| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Requires improvement |

- Leaders and managers ensure that the principles required of apprenticeship programmes are met.

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not yet consistently good in all apprenticeship provision. Although much of the teaching in health-related apprenticeships is effective, the quality of provision for IT and management apprentices is not good enough. Lecturers of IT and management apprenticeships fail to identify precisely the starting points of these apprentices. They do not use the information gathered at the start of the programme well enough to tailor learning, so that apprentices fulfil their potential. As a result, the programme does not challenge the most able apprentices sufficiently.

- Managers do not coordinate effectively all apprentices' on- and off-the-job training. For those apprentices on management and IT programmes, staff do not liaise closely enough with employers to coordinate precisely apprentices' work roles for them to put theory into practice. As a result, these apprentices do not develop the necessary skills and behaviours as quickly as they should. However, nursing apprentices benefit from a range of suitable placements that help them to develop their skills thoroughly.

- Lecturers are highly experienced in their specialist areas. In most classroom-based lessons, they use a good range of activities, such as video clips, group discussions and simulated activities that maintain most apprentices' interest. For example, nursing apprentices master the principles relating to the administration of patients' medication, such as 'right medication, right dose, right time'. However, lecturers do not ensure that all apprentices understand concepts and ideas. Too often, they move on without allowing apprentices enough time to process new knowledge. Consequently, apprentices are unable to consolidate their learning consistently well.

- Staff do not review routinely the progress that management and IT apprentices make across all elements of their apprenticeship, particularly in the workplace. As a result, apprentices do not have a sufficient understanding of their progress or of specific targets to help them improve further. Consequently, these apprentices do not make the swift progress that they should.

- Most online training for management apprentices is ineffective. Online learning sessions focus too heavily on completing assessment workbooks rather than on deepening apprentices' understanding of the topics. As a result, these apprentices fail to receive the support to help them make sufficient progress. However, apprentices do access useful online resources to support self-study activities.

- Most staff on health care provision review nursing apprentices' progress frequently. They negotiate clear and specific goals with apprentices and challenge them to extend their skills. Staff work closely with apprentices and their workplace mentors and practice facilitators to assess progress. Most current nursing apprentices are making good progress.

- Apprentices develop good practical skills. They speak confidently about the new skills they have gained and how they have applied them in the workplace. For example, IT apprentices troubleshoot network systems and configure them correctly.

- Management apprentices liaise confidently with a range of customers to secure better pricing options for their employer. Nursing apprentices record skilfully patients' pulse rates and identify accurately variations from normal rates. The large majority of apprentices

make a valuable contribution in the workplace.

- The standard of nursing apprentices' work is good. Most lecturers and mentors provide these apprentices with useful feedback that helps them advance their skills and behaviours in the workplace. However, lecturers do not consistently provide apprentices on management and IT programmes with sufficiently helpful feedback. Consequently, too many of these apprentices do not know what they need to do to improve their work to achieve the highest grades.

- Most apprentices benefit from good-quality resources. Clinical specialists support nursing apprentices to hone their skills in well-equipped simulated wards at the university. For example, apprentices check the oxygen levels on a high-fidelity mannequin who has signs of asthma and identify the patient's problems accurately. These resources help apprentices develop rapidly their skills for the workplace.

- In theory lessons, lecturers integrate English, mathematical and digital skills effectively. For example, nursing apprentices calculate the right dose of medication for patients based on their weight. IT apprentices use mathematical skills accurately to calculate data transfer rates on networks. Most apprentices speak confidently, with purpose and use specialist terminology coherently.

- Apprentices with specific learning support requirements receive effective support. They benefit from specialist support services for their learning difficulties in addition to broader pastoral needs to aid their transition into higher education. For example, staff equip apprentices with strategies to overcome their dyslexia, such as additional time to complete activities and the use of online assistive technologies to enhance their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare — Good

- The large majority of apprentices on health-related apprenticeships make good progress on their programmes. They develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for their work. Apprentices acquire new academic skills and recognise their potential to become registered nurses. All apprentices give examples of how they reflect on and improve their practice. For example, nursing apprentices know when an electro-cardiogram shows serious health issues and then act promptly on this. Management apprentices use the theory they learn about developing effective working relationships to improve productivity at work.

- Health care apprentices become more effective employees, with many taking on additional responsibilities, for example becoming a mental health champion and being the link with other health care professionals. They develop particularly high levels of confidence and become valued and effective workers who help to improve the quality of care received by patients.

- Apprentices develop a range of wider skills for work and life. They improve their use of English, mathematics and digital skills through their work, for example writing reports, doing calculations for drug administration, using digital technologies in health care and using computer-based software to complete cost-benefit analysis.

- The large majority of apprentices work in suitable roles to support their development. However, a small minority of management apprentices receive inaccurate advice and guidance when joining the programme. For example, a few apprentices on management

programmes do not have jobs of sufficient seniority to enable them to put their new learning into practice or to use their experience in their studies. As a result, these apprentices find it difficult to demonstrate their new learning and consequently make slow progress.

- Most apprentices have a good understanding of the future options to develop their careers and opportunities for further learning. They are clear about how to move into their next steps in areas such as pathways into registered nurse training, and into the IT and telecommunications industry.

- Most apprentices receive effective support to develop their academic study skills. As a result, they understand how to complete their assignments using evaluation, analysis and appropriate referencing. Many health care apprentices, studying after a significant break in learning, benefit from supportive staff who help them to manage and enjoy their learning. The large majority of apprentices access an introductory unit in university study skills and improve their academic skills. However, a few management and IT apprentices do not receive sufficient help to improve their skills, failing to receive access to the study units.

- Health care apprentices develop thoroughly their understanding of safeguarding and the risks of radicalisation and extremism. For example, they recognise the possible risks to a patient's child and notice their access to inappropriate websites. However, the large majority of management and IT apprentices do not develop a sufficient understanding of safeguarding. They know how to report safeguarding concerns, but only have a basic understating of the 'Prevent' duty and how to protect themselves from potential threats.

- Management and IT apprentices do not sufficiently develop their understanding of diversity and of the values important in the workplace and society. They cannot discuss diversity and apply relevant themes to their workplace in sufficient depth.

- Apprentices behave and attend well. They demonstrate professional standards at university and in their workplaces.

Outcomes for learners   Requires improvement

- In the previous academic year, around 100 apprentices completed their qualifications. Around two thirds followed health-related apprenticeships, with a third following IT and management frameworks. Most health-related apprentices achieved their qualifications in the time allocated. The large majority of the IT apprentices achieved their qualification, but none achieved in time. None of the few management apprentices achieved their qualifications.

- In the current academic year, the number of apprentices due to complete their course has declined. The proportion of apprentices achieving in the time allocated is declining and is low. One third of the operations/departmental manager apprentices have already left the programme early. Leaders have recognised the decline in these areas. However, it is too soon to judge whether their actions to improve provision are effective.

- Apprentices who study health-related apprenticeships produce work of a good standard and develop the skills necessary to treat patients effectively. All other apprentices' work meets the academic standard expected of them to achieve at the required level.

- Leaders do not monitor closely enough apprentices' destinations to understand fully the

effectiveness of the provision. For example, although they know that most apprentices stay in employment, they do not have sufficient information to determine the extent to which apprentices move on into more complex roles or further their career ambitions.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133882
Type of provider	Further education in higher education
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	186
Principal/CEO	Liz Barnes
Telephone number	01782 294000
Website	www.staffs.ac.uk/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	186

Number of traineeships	16–19	19+	Total
	-	-	-

Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Stoke-on-Trent College

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of employer partnerships and associate professor of work-based education and skills, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Richard Deane, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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