

Apprentice Assessments Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 2495161

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Inspection dates: 14 to 15 May 2019

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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 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.

Apprentice Assessments Ltd (AAL) secured a publicly funded contract for apprenticeship provision in August 2017. Apprentices from eight levy-paying employers are enrolled on a range of programmes. These include apprenticeships for team leading, team leaders/supervisors, and operational managers at levels 2, 3 and 5. Apprentices are in learning also in warehousing at level 2, business administration, and manufacturing. At present, 90 apprentices are in learning, of which 25 are on standards-based apprenticeships. Almost half of the apprentices are of Eastern European origin. Some 27 apprentices achieved their Level 2 apprenticeship framework in team leading in November 2018.

The governors are senior leaders of The Staffing Group, a recruitment company based also in Walsall.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

To gain a detailed and accurate report on the performance of apprentices and the quality of training, governors bought in expertise from an experienced team of consultants. These carried out a clinical analysis of the company's performance and provided a set of recommendations on how to improve.

When they discovered inadequacies in the delivery of programmes, governors took swift and decisive action to restructure the layer of senior management.

Managers had not ensured that apprenticeship provision was meeting the requirements of the funding body and the principles of apprenticeships. For example, governors identified that senior managers did not provide clear guidance to employers on the requirements of 20% off-the-job training. Employers and a few staff were unclear about what constitutes off-the-job learning.

Governors have made substantial investment in resources to improve the training and support for apprentices. For example, they established a virtual learning platform that apprentices use to access learning resources and upload their work. They have decided to retain the services of the consultant to provide extensive coaching for staff and the newly appointed managing director.

Governors have made new appointments, including the compliance and business development manager. Leaders and managers now demonstrate a good capacity to improve. Inspectors saw the positive impact of recent changes in the recruitment of apprentices to standards-based apprenticeships and the monitoring of off-the-job training. Managers now have a clear overview of apprentices' progress and achievement.

The incoming managing director, with help from the consultant and governors, has strengthened accountability across the organisation. He has made helpful revisions to job descriptions of staff, clarified job roles and set precise targets against which he can measure staff performance. Staff morale has improved. They work well as a team to reach a common goal. Trainers have benefited from extensive coaching and training. This has sharpened their teaching skills.

The culture of the company is swiftly shifting from the accreditation of existing skills, to providing the significant development of apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Managers have worked diligently to prepare for the introduction of apprenticeship standards. Apprentices and employers know the requirements of these, including the gateway and end-point assessment.

Staff expertise in information advice and guidance requires development as the company grows to give apprentices an overview of their options for training and future progression. Previously, apprentices did not receive high-quality information advice and guidance. Inspectors identified several apprentices who were inappropriately placed on programmes that were either too demanding or not demanding enough.

Quality improvement is much sharper now. Managers now have a clearer idea of what they need to do to improve. For example, managers now seek apprentices' views at different stages of their learning programme and make improvements. They have devised a detailed quality assurance strategy that includes compliance with funding body requirements and internal quality assurance procedures.

Recent observations of teaching, learning and assessment measure the trainer's input rather than apprentices' learning. Managers do not seek employers' views routinely to improve the provision. However, managers are now beginning to work closely with them to ensure that apprentices link practical with theory sessions to consolidate their skills.

The governance of the provider is strong. Governors are very knowledgeable, conscientious and highly committed to providing high-quality training to apprentices. Governors have a precise short- and medium-term quality improvement plan. They took decisive and well-considered action to bring about necessary change to improve the provision for apprentices. Governors and senior managers know precisely how all apprenticeship programmes perform and the progress apprentices make. Staff now provide appropriate support for apprentices who are making slow progress, in order to help them to catch up.

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

Trainers do not plan sessions well in a logical order that builds on the knowledge of apprentices. They focus on giving apprentices information on a wide range of topics in one-to-one sessions. The topics and sessions do not logically link. In their hurry to cover the theory part of the programme, trainers cover a range of often unrelated and disjointed activities. This makes it difficult for apprentices to retain this knowledge and use it later to apply to their job roles.

A significant number of apprentices do not receive high-quality off-the-job training in time for a variety of reasons, which are mainly to do with workload and cover for absent colleagues. Trainers then rush to pack a lot of content into training sessions. At present, managers are making concerted efforts to ensure that all apprentices get their due entitlement to training.

Trainers' assessment of apprentices' starting points is weak. They do not identify clearly apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours at the start of their apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices do not have individual learning programmes that develop their knowledge, skills, understanding and behaviours.

Trainers do not provide sufficiently high-quality support in developing apprentices' English and mathematics. Staff conduct initial screening of apprentices routinely in order to identify their levels of English, mathematics and Information Communication Technology (ICT) so as to place them on programmes and refer them to online learning. However, this type of learning, in the absence of trainer support, does not meet their needs in their employment sector. Trainers do not conduct further diagnostic assessment of apprentices to identify gaps in their learning, and they fail to prepare them adequately for the academic demands of the programme. This restricts apprentices' ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing and to move into higher-level management positions.

Staff do not have sufficiently high-level expertise in English and mathematics and, to some extent, in teaching apprentices in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Many apprentices who need help with English, mathematics and English for

speakers of other languages do not receive it. Consequently, they make slow progress. Their English and mathematical skills and knowledge do not improve.

Leaders and managers mostly ensure that apprenticeship programmes meet the needs of employers, although inspectors found that several apprentices were on programmes which were inappropriate for them. Apprentices gain new knowledge, skills, behaviours and confidence, although they are not making the progress they should. They develop a strong work ethic, for example in warehousing and storage. Managers now keep employers better informed about apprentices' progress. They involve them, as necessary, in the planning and design of programmes around their business needs.

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

Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding. Governors and senior managers adopt a policy of safe recruitment for staff, including checks on their right to work in the UK. They conduct thorough background checks on staff to ensure that they are suitable for a teaching role.

The safeguarding lead briefs the managing director and the governors on their responsibilities and advises on steps to ensure that apprentices are working and learning in safe environments.

Managers risk assess employers' premises to ensure that apprentices are safe. Managers also identify any vulnerable adults. They provide help and guidance and refer apprentices to a range of support agencies with which they have good links. Apprentices are made aware of a broad range of risks in society, including misuse of the internet, in a helpful learner handbook. Trainers check apprentices' understanding of these risks during induction and progress reviews.

Apprentices are clear about how to protect themselves and their peers from risks. Apprentices know who to contact at the company if they have any safeguarding or safeguarding-related concerns.

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