

Merlin Supply Chain Solutions 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 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 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Merlin Supply Chain Solutions Limited was established in 2014 and joined the register of apprenticeship providers in 2017. It has offices in Kettering and training centres across the UK. Sixteen apprentices study the supply chain specialist LGV (large goods vehicle) driver standard at Level 2, three apprentices study the international freight forwarding specialist standard at level 3 and five apprentices have recently enrolled on the gas engineering operative standard at level 3.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and senior managers have a clear strategic vision for the level 2 LGV driver and the level 3 international freight apprenticeship standards, which they helped to design. They have implemented flexible curriculums to help businesses develop and retain their professional drivers.

Senior managers provide employers with good support to recruit apprentices. Almost all applicants have no previous LGV experience and, on successful completion of their apprenticeship, all have a full-time job. As a result, the programmes have a positive impact on employers' businesses. For example, they report reduced accident rates and reduced costs due to reduction in the number of agency drivers needed.

Senior managers are careful in the selection and recruitment of subcontractors. They have implemented a range of good-quality monitoring and improvement arrangements. They communicate regularly with their subcontracted apprentices, to ensure the quality of support and training they receive. As a result, subcontracted apprentices make at least the progress expected.

Senior managers ensure that the requirements of an apprenticeship are met and adhered to. They are rigorous in ensuring that all apprentices understand the arrangements for end-point assessment, grading criteria and on- and off-the-job

training. They have identified that the method of recording off-the-job training requires improvement.

Leaders and senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and have a clear oversight of the business. They have a good understanding of the progress that each apprentice makes and the support in place for apprentices who fall behind. As a result, they recognise the need to improve data collection to support improvements in the analysis of apprentices' performance.

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

The curriculum is sequenced carefully to ensure that apprentices develop the relevant and timely skills, knowledge and behaviours required for the job. They can explain the complexities of the braking system of their vehicles and know how to conduct a safety check on a vehicle before the start of a journey.

All apprentices benefit from a flexible curriculum that can be changed to meet their needs and the needs of their employers. For example, the timing of training at the start of the apprenticeship can be changed to suit the pace of learning. All on- and off-the-job training is well planned and clearly identified. As a result, a significant number of apprentices have achieved a distinction grade in their apprenticeship.

Staff identify the starting points for each apprentice and offer any additional support they require. Apprentices who need to develop their mathematics and English skills are supported well by tutors, using online resources. As a result, the first-time pass rate for level 1 is high. However, these skills are not developed throughout the apprenticeship, and assessment of submitted work is not sufficiently developmental.

Tutors are suitably qualified and experienced. Training sessions have a clear focus on assessment of learning and understanding. This is checked constantly throughout training sessions. For example, apprentices discuss the well-being of a professional driver and identify what improves or impairs competence to drive effectively. They are encouraged to embrace the good practices expected of a professional driver before they learn to drive an LGV.

Quality assurance arrangements are effective. All tutors are observed in training sessions and know what they need to do to improve. However, in-house training is not focused sufficiently on improving the quality of education and training.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive. The designated safeguarding lead and deputy are working towards level 3 and 4 safeguarding qualifications. Appropriate checks are undertaken on all staff. All apprentices and staff receive training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty, British values and equality and diversity. As a result, apprentices are aware of British values, the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, and the reporting chain if they have concerns. At the time of the monitoring visit, no significant safeguarding issues had been raised.

All apprentices learn the good health-and-safety practices that are required before they drive and when driving any vehicle to ensure their safety and the safety of the public. This is enforced rigorously. As a result, apprentices feel safe. All apprentices are given a tablet that contains their e-portfolio. However, digital skills and e-safety are not developed or discussed sufficiently throughout the programme.

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