

Zenith People Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Pat Hornsby, Ofsted Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 201 Business Works
Henry Robson Way
South Shields
NE33 1RF

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.

Zenith People Limited has offices in Hebburn and South Shields in South Tyneside. It began delivering apprenticeships for levy-paying employers in January 2018. Most apprentices are on business administration and sales programmes. The company also offers apprenticeships in customer service, team leading and operational/departmental management. Programmes range from level 2 to level 5, and include both apprenticeship frameworks and standards. Apprentices are employed in the manufacturing and service industries in the north east of England. Currently, 63 apprentices are on programmes, of whom a quarter are aged 16 to 18.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders use local and regional labour market information, and their links with external stakeholders, to develop programmes that meet local and regional needs. They work closely with employers to recruit apprentices who are suited well to their job roles and to place them on the right programme.

Leaders and managers ensure that the principles and requirements of apprenticeships are met. They plan the curriculum effectively so that apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours required for their roles. They ensure that apprentices receive sufficient time for off-the-job learning.

Leaders and managers use accurate information on apprentices' progress to monitor them closely, and to take action if apprentices are falling behind with their studies. In such instances, assessors increase the frequency of their support visits.

Leaders and managers have taken effective action, since the first year of delivery when retention was low, to reduce the number of apprentices who leave their programmes early. They have ceased to work with a few employers that were not sufficiently supportive.

Leaders and managers ensure that sufficient staff resources are allocated to deliver the programmes. Assessors visit apprentices in the workplace at least once each month to provide coaching and support. Assessors complete training to keep up to date with their subjects and the qualification requirements. However, they have not completed any recent training to develop and refresh their teaching skills.

Suitable quality assurance arrangements are in place, including observations of training, audits of apprentices' evidence portfolios and annual self-assessment. A governing board is in place to provide external scrutiny and support. Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and are implementing an improvement plan. They have rightly identified the need to provide training for staff in mathematics, so that they are better able to support apprentices who are completing functional skills qualifications.

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**

Most apprentices make the progress expected of them and develop knowledge and skills that are of significant benefit to their employers, such as greater success in price negotiations and sales campaigns. They contribute fully in their work roles and grow in confidence. For example, apprentices are able to take on more responsibility at work to cover for absences among more senior colleagues.

Staff liaise closely with employers to keep them informed of apprentices' progress and make effective connections between all parts of the programme. Employers are involved in selecting the optional units that apprentices complete, ensuring that programmes link well to workplace learning opportunities.

Tutors use a wide range of assessment methods that allow apprentices to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. For example, tutors use observations, recorded discussions and witness testimonies, as well as written assignments. Most tutors ask probing and challenging questions that require apprentices to demonstrate their understanding clearly and fully.

All apprentices receive sufficient time during working hours to complete off-the-job studies. They log the hours spent and tutors check that they have recorded the time accurately during monthly visits. Tutors monitor off-the-job learning hours to check that apprentices receive their entitlement in a timely manner.

A small number of apprentices are making slower than expected progress. Where apprentices fall behind, tutors increase the frequency of their workplace visits. However, they do not set apprentices sufficiently challenging deadlines. As a result, too few apprentices catch up quickly enough while receiving intensive support.

Tutors focus primarily on apprentices completing tasks and meeting assessment criteria. Apprentices are motivated by targets to complete their qualifications, which they do while developing vocational and personal skills.

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

Managers implement a range of policies to safeguard apprentices. They conduct thorough background checks on new staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with apprentices. They have completed a risk assessment and action plan to reduce the risk of radicalisation and extremism.

All staff have completed training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty and, as a result, know how to refer safeguarding concerns. The designated safeguarding lead has completed specialist training for the role and responds appropriately to concerns raised.

Managers have good links with external agencies, including the local council's safeguarding adults board. They share the latest information and training opportunities with staff to develop their knowledge and keep them up to date.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to raise safeguarding concerns. However, their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in the region, such as those posed by far-right groups, is insufficient.

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