

Mercury Training Services Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1270899

Name of lead inspector: Martin Ward, Her Majesty's Inspector

Inspection date(s): 4–5 December 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 '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.

Mercury Training Services Limited (Mercury Training) was established in 2005. It provides education and training in the security, retail and automotive industries. Since September 2018, Mercury Training has delivered apprenticeships as a prime-contract holder. There are currently 59 apprentices. Roughly equal numbers of apprentices are enrolled on operational management at level 5, team leadership and first-line security management at level 3, and customer service at level 2. They are standards-based apprenticeships. Apprentices are in Birmingham and Coleshill in the West Midlands, in Manchester and in London. There are three main employers with which Mercury works.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and trainers use their detailed understanding of the security sector to deliver apprenticeships in leadership and management and customer service well. They have extended their business into the retail and automotive sectors successfully. Apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Managers work closely with employers to develop apprenticeship courses which reflect current business practice. For example, managers have enhanced the new security manager apprenticeship programme by including specific training on the use of closed-circuit television, and the management of conflict.

Managers and employers have a good understanding of the standards-based apprenticeships. Following careful initial advice and guidance, managers and trainers place apprentices on the right course. Trainers and employers support apprentices well to identify and use their off-the-job training.

Managers have been slow in planning for the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Managers have recently improved the strategy and practice in this area. Apprentices are now developing these skills.

The managing director has managed the growth of the business wisely in line with the size and skills of the small team of trainers. Staff are trained in preparation for a change of role. As a result, most apprentices benefit from good support.

Managers understand the key strengths and weaknesses of the provision through effective management meetings and observations of trainers. They use feedback from tutors, employers and apprentices well. For example, trainers changed their approach to target setting for level 2 apprentices. These apprentices now make better progress.

Managers introduced a new electronic system for tracking the progress of apprentices. Despite some technical and compliance issues, good communication between managers and trainers means these are not adversely affecting current apprentices.

Recently the managing director has established an advisory board comprising three new members. They have the knowledge and skills to provide significant support and challenge for the senior team. They are already having a positive impact.

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

Trainers have appropriate vocational experience. They have, or are working towards, appropriate teaching qualifications. Trainers skilfully relate content and professional discussion to learners' own work situations. They use these very effectively to enable apprentices to develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours. For example, a customer service apprentice who works in a post office collection depot is now able to reduce conflict with frustrated customers. Apprentices have a positive impact on the business in which they work.

Trainers plan learning so that apprentices' new knowledge and skills build on what apprentices already know and can do. In the level 5 management apprenticeship, trainers rightly concentrate on theory units earlier in the programme and develop skills through application of theory as learners move forwards. An operations manager at level 5 is using new project management skills to introduce a major change in working practice.

Trainers adapt the course to reflect apprentices' starting points. For example, if an apprentice demonstrates existing, significant understanding, the trainer plans the curriculum around the gaps in knowledge.

Apprentices are motivated by recording their learning activities in a variety of forms. For example, apprentices record evidence through photographs, short videos and audio clips. Trainers provide helpful feedback, and most apprentices are clear about what they need to do to improve. However, feedback is not consistently helpful at level 2.

Trainers use assessments well to check apprentices' understanding and to inform teaching. Despite the issues with the electronic tracking system, trainers are swift to provide support when apprentices fall behind.

Managers and trainers assess thoroughly apprentices' English and mathematics skills at the start of the course. Apprentices have access to online learning resources. However, until recently few apprentices used these resources. Apprentices were making slow progress. A specialist trainer is now employed to support apprentices face-to-face and to monitor their progress. Apprentices are making better progress.

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

Leaders and managers have taken appropriate steps to ensure the safety of apprentices and create a positive culture of safeguarding in the business. The designated safeguarding officer and deputy are appropriately trained.

Senior leaders have effective links with local safeguarding organisations. They are aware of the safeguarding issues in the areas in which they operate. As appropriate, they share this information with trainers and apprentices. The designated safeguarding lead understands how and when to refer matters to the appropriate authorities.

Trainers receive good online training resources. They produce and use high-quality training resources with their apprentices.

Apprentices, particularly those in the security sector, have a detailed knowledge of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, and how these apply to their job roles. All staff receive appropriate checks before being employed.

The managing director carries out thorough risk assessments regarding the health and safety arrangements for the premises where apprentices are employed.

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