

Staffordshire University

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Staffordshire University was inspected in May 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

All apprentices are taking standards-based apprenticeships. The university has 600 apprentices in total, of which 190 are currently enrolled on level 4 and level 5 apprenticeships. Of these, 112 are enrolled on healthcare apprenticeships. The focus of this visit is on the remaining 78 apprentices, as the areas for improvement at the previous inspection related to these programmes. Sixty-six are enrolled on management apprenticeships, seven are enrolled on business and five on information technology (IT) apprenticeships.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in improving the quality of provision for management and IT apprentices? In particular, what progress have lecturers made in identifying and using apprentices' starting points to sequence learning activities so that apprentices gain appropriate knowledge, skills and behaviours and complete their programme on time?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have taken decisive action to improve the quality of provision for management and IT apprentices since the previous inspection.

Newly appointed staff have extensive experience of apprenticeships. They have reviewed and revised the delivery of programmes. They have made effective changes to initial assessment, progress reviews and feedback to apprentices. This is beginning to have a positive impact on the experience of apprentices.

The initial assessment of apprentices is rigorous. For example, staff identify apprentices' starting points precisely. They consider their background, barriers to learning, aptitude and expectations of the course. They also establish their existing knowledge, skills and behaviours and plan learning accordingly. Staff are beginning to use the findings of initial assessment to make learning more challenging and varied. However, it is too early to gauge the full impact of these changes.

Progress reviews are more regular and meaningful. Employers contribute by evaluating apprentices' application of knowledge and skills in the workplaces. All

apprentices are making expected or better progress. Managers review and intervene to support those who are making slow progress.

Staff have devised a more detailed template for providing structured feedback to apprentices. Most feedback is precise and developmental. As a result, apprentices are more confident and know how to produce higher standards of work. Apprentices have high aspirations. However, their progress towards achieving merits and distinctions is not consistently recorded in their learning plans.

Staff and managers have made changes to the design of programmes in response to apprentices' and employers' feedback. This includes the order in which lecturers teach some modules. For example, a module on communication and self-awareness is now covered in a greater detail, and at an early stage of learning. This helps apprentices build on this knowledge in later modules. Lecturers now teach a finance module face-to-face over two days instead of one day, to ensure that apprentices have the secure knowledge to build on.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that governors receive reports which give them a good oversight of the quality of all aspects of the provision, so that they can hold leaders and managers fully to account?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, governors have given the apprenticeship provision a much higher priority within the university. The university's audit and risk committee has added apprenticeship provision to its risk register to monitor it more closely.

Governors now receive a detailed dashboard on the performance of apprentices. They use the information they receive to challenge managers appropriately. As an example, in one meeting, governors received information on the frequency of progress reviews. They requested further information on the quality of the reviews carried out. This led to managers improving their monitoring of the quality of reviews.

Since the previous inspection, governors have devised new key performance indicators (KPI). This allows governors to have a good overview of the numbers of learners staying on programme, and of timely completions. However, while monitored frequently, the KPIs are not very ambitious.

Governors support the development of apprenticeship provision by ensuring that it is properly resourced. As a result, the university has recently appointed an associate dean for apprenticeships.

Managers do not report enough on the quality of education. As a result, governors do not have a clear understanding of how well teaching enables apprentices to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to complete their programme.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that all apprentices have a good understanding of diversity and fundamental British values to help them work effectively with others? Reasonable progress

Managers have improved the information employers and apprentices receive on the apprenticeship programme. The employer partnerships team has produced a new guide for employers. This clearly sets out expectations for them, including in relation to British values, diversity and the 'Prevent' duty.

All apprentices receive a thorough induction which includes appropriate references to British values and diversity. Assessors reinforce these at the 12-weekly reviews. Managers have recently begun to evaluate the quality of these reviews. In business management reviews, safeguarding, fundamental British values and the 'Prevent' duty are discussed and recorded in detail. Assessors use prompts effectively to test, reinforce and extend apprentices' understanding. As a result, these apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding, diversity and the 'Prevent' duty within the context of their workplace. However, for the small number of IT apprentices there was little evidence of discussion or reinforcement of British values and the 'Prevent' duty in reviews. As a result, their understanding was less secure.

Lecturers have had training on embedding British values and the 'Prevent' duty in the curriculum since the last inspection. As a result, there are increasing examples of these being well integrated into the curriculum. For example, in a primary research and ethics module, business apprentices were asked to consider how questions should be framed to take account of diversity, respect and tolerance.

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