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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 the Education and Skills Funding Agency 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.

Watson Martin was established in 2004. It offers professional qualifications in learning and development and human resource management. In January 2018, the company became an accredited apprenticeship provider. At the time of the inspection, there were 69 apprentices on level 3 and level 5 standards, split evenly between human resources management and learning and development standards.

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 managers have forged close working relationships with large employers. They co-design apprenticeship programmes to match employers' specific business needs. Following the first cohort of apprentices, leaders have put in place effective plans to improve the learning experience. For example, they encourage collaboration between apprentices from different employers to share best practice from others. Apprentices benefit greatly from the professional accreditation and career progression within human resources and learning and development roles that the apprenticeship provides. Many aspire to go on to the Level 7 postgraduate programme.

Employers fully understand and meet their obligations, including for the off-the-job training entitlement. Employers are very supportive of their apprentices and, as a result, very few leave the programme. Apprentice advisers regularly inform line managers about upcoming off-the-job training and assessment deadlines. This helps to keep apprentices on track.

Leaders and managers have put in place effective arrangements to track apprentices' progress. They produce bespoke progress reports for each employer that identify those at risk of falling behind or who are not meeting off-the-job training quotas.

The vast majority of apprentices are on course to complete within planned timescales.

In their contract with employers, managers ensure that they commit to all the elements of each apprentice's programme. Leaders manage effectively the subcontractor that delivers the English and mathematics components. The few apprentices that require these qualifications begin these studies early in their programme and most pass at the first attempt.

Quality assurance arrangements are effective. Managers regularly observe face-to-face and online training sessions in order to raise standards. Advisers meet frequently to review all aspects of delivery. The quality improvement plan identifies appropriate improvement actions; however, leaders do not accurately self-assess their past performance. Managers do not use data, including learner feedback, to identify any differences in the progress of different groups of apprentices.

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

Apprentices acquire new and occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours. They gain in confidence through leading meetings or holding difficult conversations with staff. Advisers sequence knowledge components of the standard in a logical order that enables apprentices to apply theory to their working practice. For example, apprentices improve their teamwork as a result of knowing the personality types associated with Belbin team roles.

Leaders and managers conduct thorough assessments of apprentices' skills and knowledge at the start of the programme. They carry out competence-based interviews to screen potential apprentices. They involve line managers when assessing prior learning and matching apprentices to the right level and standard. In some cases, experienced employees are deemed unsuited for the programme.

Apprentices receive good-quality off-the-job training from well-qualified advisers. They benefit from the extensive professional experience that advisers bring to individual coaching sessions. All apprentices attend and actively participate in themed workshops and webinars that bring the apprenticeship to life. These activities are complemented with course materials and extensive online resources, allowing those who miss a session to catch up. Apprentices complete a weekly reflective journal that provides an insightful record of their learning.

Advisers provide effective support for apprentices. They maintain frequent contact and monitor apprentices' progress via their electronic portfolios. Regular assessments are matched closely to qualification specifications. However, advisers' feedback on these submissions lacks critical analysis of how apprentices can improve, especially

at level 5. Apprentices receive detailed progress reviews and these contain useful targets.

Arrangements for end-point assessment are well-planned. Apprentices understand the requirements for end-point assessment; for example, they work towards their final project. However, they are not fully aware of how to attain higher grades.

Apprentices that require English and mathematics qualifications receive good support from specialist tutors. Those that require extra support are quickly helped. Advisers do not sufficiently develop apprentices' English skills to study at higher levels.

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

Leaders and managers place high importance on the safety and well-being of apprentices. They have effective arrangements to keep them safe. Safeguarding is routinely discussed at management meetings and referenced in apprentices' progress reviews.

All staff have checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with apprentices. They complete training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding lead has taken an advanced safeguarding course. Appropriate policies are in place, although these lack detail about individual staff responsibilities. Leaders and managers meet their obligations under the 'Prevent' duty.

Apprentices know how to report any concerns. They have access to an out-of-hours line to the multi-agency safeguarding hub. Apprentices understand topical safeguarding issues in the workforce, for example social media harassment. They are aware of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation; for example, they receive training in how to respond to a terrorist or weapons threat.

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