

# Universal Skills Centre Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	57463
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Alison Gray, Ofsted Inspector
<b>Inspection dates:</b>	12–13 February 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Address:</b>	Units 41–43 Monckton Road Industrial Estate Denby Dale Road Wakefield WF2 7AL

## 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.

Universal Skills Centre Ltd delivers training in the construction and utilities sectors. It began to deliver a levy-funded apprenticeship in January 2019. Currently, 175 apprentices are on standards-based programmes in dual fuel smart meter installations at level 2. Apprentices work for large utility companies nationwide. Almost all are over 19 years of age. They attend a custom-built centre in Wakefield for initial training and receive support through on-site mentoring and field assessment.

### 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 ensure that the curriculum meets government priorities for economic regeneration, sustainability and the national move towards renewable energy. Their clear rationale for the curriculum is to meet the skills gap in the provision of smart meter training. The apprenticeship provides opportunities for apprentices to gain sustained employment in the energy utilities sector.

The programme meets the principles of an apprenticeship. Leaders and managers carefully sequence the delivery of provision to enable apprentices to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, apprentices acquire new technical expertise that enables them to work safely and independently in the public domain. Apprentices successfully develop their testing and problem-solving skills. For example, they routinely deal with challenges such as incorrectly synchronised meters.

Leaders and managers have a clear oversight of their provision through the electronic records that they keep. They hold frequent meetings to review apprentices' progress. Staff intervene swiftly with the small minority of apprentices who fall behind. They communicate with employers about apprentices' progress to enable employers to support apprentices effectively. Leaders and managers have a highly critical understanding of the provider's strengths and areas for improvement.

To support strategic oversight and scrutiny of their provision, they set up a board of governance in February 2019.

Apprentices receive relevant advice from trainers about potential career routes in the utilities sector, such as in electric vehicle installation. However, they do not benefit from impartial advice and guidance about wider opportunities to support their career aspirations.

Trainers discuss end-point assessment (EPA) with apprentices, the majority of whom are aware of the timescales. Apprentices consider that their working practice prepares them well for final assessment. However, a small minority are unsure about the content or the external assessment part of the EPA process. Apprentices have not yet been through EPA and so it is too early to evaluate their achievement.

**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 develop practical skills and technical knowledge that they use effectively in their work on domestic electric and gas networks. Trainers and field assessors work closely with apprentices to ensure that they gain the expertise that they need to do their jobs competently. Apprentices learn how to complete installations on a wide range of different meters, which enables them to work safely on live cables.

Apprentices demonstrate high standards of professional behaviour at work. This results in their employers valuing them as productive team members. Apprentices know how well they are progressing on their programme. Trainers set action plans for apprentices who are at risk of falling behind, so they can quickly catch up.

Apprentices benefit from training that is both challenging and enjoyable, particularly the practical aspects of installation and testing. Trainers plan and deliver the off-the-job element well.

Trainers and field assessors provide helpful support to improve apprentices' English, mathematical and digital skills. Apprentices demonstrate good speaking and listening skills when discussing work with customers. They improve their technical report-writing skills through maintaining accurate installation records. They systematically use test data to compare system pressures and voltages. They use technology well to record meter updates accurately in what is a highly regulated industry.

Most apprentices do not have prior experience of working in the sector. During their apprenticeship, they develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they apply in their job roles. A small minority of apprentices already have previous experience of working in related industries. However, their programme does not

reflect this, and they follow a programme of similar length to that for apprentices with no experience.

Apprentices benefit from coaching by highly experienced industry technicians who set very high standards for workplace behaviours and customer care. Apprentices learn how to treat customers in their own homes with courtesy and respect.

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

Apprentices feel safe. They understand the process for reporting concerns, including online risks. All staff receive appropriate training. As a result, they deal with any safeguarding incidents effectively.

Leaders and managers ensure that all staff are subject to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. All apprentices have DBS checks in line with the requirements of the apprenticeship. Managers apply safe recruitment practices when they select staff. A designated safeguarding lead and deputy are in place and have completed appropriate training to carry out their roles.

Leaders and managers promote a culture of working safely and respectfully in this high-risk sector. They have introduced a 'don't walk by' campaign to remind staff and apprentices of their safeguarding responsibilities.

A few apprentices lack a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of the potential risks of county lines, extremism and radicalisation at work and in their daily lives. Leaders and managers are taking rapid action to address this.

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