

Pier Technology Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Sharon Dowling, Her Majesty's Inspector

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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.

Pier Technology Limited – trading as Pier Training Limited – is an independent learning provider purchased by the current owner in March 2018. Pier Technology Limited was registered to deliver apprenticeships as a prime contract provider by the previous owners. The provider started delivery of apprenticeships in April 2018, having transferred in 89 apprentices from another provider. A national provider, Pier Technology Limited has apprentices across England. There are currently 186 apprentices. Apprentices are enrolled on level 2 and level 3 healthcare apprenticeships and a range of professional apprenticeships, including level 5 operations management, level 2 team leading and level 3 business administration apprenticeships. A very small proportion of apprentices are on frameworks in business administration and team leading. The provider works with 16 employers. It provides training in a wide variety of settings, including hospitals, local authorities and industry. Pier Technology Limited has no subcontracted provision.

Themes

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

Managers are taking a measured approach to the strategic development of the curriculum, ensuring that the required delivery expertise is in place before starting or expanding the apprenticeship provision. They have used their own experience to diversify into areas in which they have confidence, for example into management, team leading and business administration apprenticeships, creating capacity to expand the delivery for healthcare services.

Managers work closely with employers to develop apprenticeships that are responsive to the needs of the business. The apprenticeship programme at MDA fulfilment centre is planned in conjunction with the human resource manager, ensuring that its values are embedded into the programme and that training meets its specific needs.

Managers understand the key strengths and weaknesses of the provider through effective management meetings and the implementation of observations of tutors. They rapidly put in place strategies to improve. For example, managers recognised that the initial turnover of staff has resulted in some apprentices not receiving consistently high-quality training during transition periods. They have acted to recruit tutors who have appropriate expertise to deliver high-quality education.

Managers regularly meet with tutors to discuss the progress of apprentices. They use these processes to identify apprentices at risk of falling behind and work with tutors to put in place interventions. As a result, these apprentices receive prompt and appropriate support to catch up.

Managers have been slow in improving apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Managers have recently appointed tutors in English and mathematics. However, it is too soon to see the impact on the apprentices' skills and knowledge development in these subjects.

Managers monitor off-the-job training effectively. Where employers have been slow to support this, the provider is quick to intervene to ensure that the employer is fulfilling this responsibility.

Leaders have appointed external advisers who provide support and act as critical friends on strategic direction and finance. However, their expertise means that they are unable to provide effective support and challenge for curriculum and quality.

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 are completing a structured programme of learning, from which they are developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They use these in their daily work. For example, team leader apprentices develop their knowledge of team roles. They develop their skills in dealing with individuals within teams and dealing with potential conflict.

The majority of tutors are experienced and well qualified. They use this experience to plan and deliver bespoke and appropriate training for their apprentices. As a result, apprentices are becoming more confident in the workplace. They are able to carry out more complex tasks and are developing improved skills and professional behaviours.

Apprentices receive much of their training through online resources and one-to-one interaction with trainers. As a result, not all learners can learn with and from their peers or build their communication skills and confidence effectively.

Trainers do not always use probing questioning or other assessment strategies well enough to ensure that apprentices develop a deep understanding of new information, so that they remember it long term and apply it in different contexts within the workplace.

Tutors encourage and signpost apprentices to additional reading and resources to support units. As a result, apprentices broaden their research skills and are confident to put theory into practice within their individual work environments.

Tutors' written feedback to apprentices is not always detailed enough to help them move forward and make rapid progress in their learning. However, apprentices rightly value the oral feedback given on their performance.

Apprentices have a detailed understanding of what is required for their end-point assessment and are well prepared. They are confident and can demonstrate how they are using their new or strengthened skills and knowledge to meet the criteria in their specific work environments. However, where the majority of apprentices achieve merits or distinctions in portfolio assessment, a large majority of apprentices do not receive consistent support to achieve high grades at the interview assessment.

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

Leaders and managers have made sure that they have in place processes to ensure the safety of apprentices. The designated safeguarding officers are appropriately trained. Tutors have referred a small number of apprentices for support, which they have received as needed.

Leaders are working with trainers and apprentices to develop their understanding of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders see the importance of increasing apprentices' awareness of these topics, and the majority of apprentices demonstrate a detailed understanding.

Tutors effectively embed equality, diversity and British values into planned taught sessions. Learners are confident and knowledgeable and demonstrate a sound understanding of these themes. For example, they know to ensure that patients in day clinics, who may have to be ready for pick-up very early in the morning, do not miss breakfast.

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