

Alchemist Consultants Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Andrea Shepherd, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Evolve Business Centre
Cygnet Way
Rainton Bridge Industrial Estate
Houghton-le-Spring
DH4 5QY

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.

Alchemist Consultants Limited is an independent learning provider based in Houghton-le-Spring, near Durham. It delivers apprenticeships on behalf of levy-paying employers in the north east, midlands and north west of England. It currently has 66 apprentices, of whom 38 study the level 3 team leader/supervisor standard and 23 study the level 5 operations/departmental manager standard. Five apprentices study the industrial applications framework at level 2. All apprentices are over the age of 18. Alchemist Consultants Limited works with one subcontractor that delivers functional skills courses for apprentices located in the north east.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders develop apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of employers very well. Employers are right to value the expertise of the provider's staff and the industrial relevance of the curriculum. Leaders make good use of information from employers to identify current priorities and to inform the programme content. For example, they now include total preventative management in their delivery of the operations/departmental manager standard at level 5.

Leaders are aware of how much progress each apprentice makes. They carry out checks to ensure that apprentices complete the required aspects of their programme. They work closely with each apprentice to review the completion of activities. Leaders take appropriate steps to support those apprentices who fall behind. For example, leaders proactively engage with employers to ensure that apprentices who miss their off-the-job training receive time away from their job to catch up with their work.

Leaders accurately identify areas for improvement. They routinely reflect on the delivery and management of the programme to identify potential lessons for the

future. For example, leaders now have a more systematic approach to monitoring apprentices' progress.

Leaders are right to recognise the need for more external scrutiny of the apprenticeship programme. They have identified individuals who have appropriate skills and expertise to join a governance board. However, because this group has not yet met, it is too soon to judge any impact.

Leaders have been too slow to make suitable arrangements for apprentices to complete their end-point assessment. As a result, a small minority of apprentices have not been able to complete their programme within the expected timescale. However, leaders now understand the requirements of the standards. A third of the affected cohort of apprentices have recently taken at least one element of their end-point assessment, with only a short delay.

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 plan the curriculum so that apprentices can logically build their knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, trainers deliver the basics of operations management before introducing lean management techniques. As a result, apprentices rapidly progress to complex tasks such as workflow analysis.

Trainers use their significant subject and industry expertise helpfully to relate theory to practice. Apprentices benefit from highly relevant and current examples to demonstrate the application of theoretical models. Consequently, this helps them to recall what they have learned. For example, apprentices use practical examples of unconscious bias to help them to understand the theory.

Trainers make good use of the information they have about apprentices to plan a meaningful programme of on- and off-the-job training. They support apprentices to identify opportunities to shadow more senior colleagues or attend meetings to complement the taught sessions. These opportunities help apprentices to develop relevant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, apprentices build their awareness of emotional intelligence and apply this when they manage people in the workplace.

Trainers provide valuable support for apprentices to review their own performance and to apply this to the workplace. Apprentices complete a time management study to assess how effective they are in completing tasks. This enables them to identify and address inefficiencies in the workplace.

Trainers give useful feedback that helps apprentices to improve the standard of their work. Apprentices are clear on how to improve their work. As a result, they develop their written and practical skills.

Leaders have made appropriate arrangements for the large majority of apprentices to complete successfully the required functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. They ensure that employers and the subcontractor work effectively together to deliver functional skills courses. However, leaders have been too slow in arranging the delivery of functional skills for a few apprentices, particularly in the north west.

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

Leaders provide apprentices with a range of training packages and useful information about keeping safe. All apprentices complete suitable training on safeguarding, online safety, and the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices know how to identify risks and report concerns.

Leaders implement appropriate policies and systems to comply with safeguarding legislation and the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty. They provide good support for apprentices and ensure that appropriate external help is in place for apprentices who experience difficulties. Leaders assess their own performance accurately in a range of areas and identify suitable actions to mitigate the risks. For example, they correctly identified the need to seek external advice on a freedom of speech policy.

Leaders are right to recognise that they should develop more comprehensive systems for staff recruitment as they begin to increase their workforce. The very small group of existing staff have all been subject to Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

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