

University of Reading

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 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.

University of Reading, through their Henley Business School, runs a programme of higher- and degree-level apprenticeships from level 5 to level 7. The apprentices within the scope of this visit are 179 apprentices on the level 5 operations departmental manager standard apprenticeship. Managers stopped recruiting apprentices onto a programme run by the university in March 2019, but 33 apprentices remain on this programme. The first cohort of apprentices recruited onto a new subcontracted partner programme started in November 2019, and this has 146 apprentices.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders have a sound strategic intention for the apprenticeship programme that they offer. It forms a natural extension to the university's longstanding tradition of delivering business qualifications. Henley Business School's leaders view apprentices as 'productivity drivers', who contribute to their strategy to improve the economic performance of the companies with which they work.

Leaders use the Henley Business School's international reputation to develop strong and effective relationships with employers, such as large retail groups and the NHS. They communicate their expectations effectively, so that employers know what their commitment should be. If an employer cannot meet these expectations, leaders will not agree an apprenticeship programme. As a result, they recruit apprentices with integrity and meet the requirements of an apprenticeship programme.

Leaders and managers have developed an appropriate curriculum, which enables apprentices to become associates of the Chartered Management Institute, while

studying. This gives them access to management networks and additional training events outside their workplaces and the university.

Leaders and managers know the strengths and weaknesses of their provision well. They make well-considered decisions, such as ceasing the recruitment of apprentices onto the university's programme and using a subcontracted partnership for all future apprenticeships.

Leaders' oversight and management of the subcontracted arrangements are appropriate. Staff have developed good communication between the university, employer and subcontractor. They monitor apprentices' progress through weekly meetings.

Leaders and managers have been too slow in developing the arrangements for a small minority of apprentices who need to take their English and mathematics qualifications. Consequently, these apprentices will not complete their apprenticeships within the planned timescale.

Leaders and managers do not always benefit from scrutiny by professionals who have apprenticeship experience. As a result, quality assurance processes such as their self-assessment lack the evaluative judgements that leaders will need in order to maintain a high-quality programme.

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

Staff ensure that apprentices who are new to management develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Apprentices gain confidence as they practise their new skills in the workplace and receive positive feedback from their line managers.

Staff plan a curriculum which they order logically. It enables apprentices to identify their existing skills and develop new skills and behaviours. These start with self-awareness and operational management topics and end with a project relevant to their businesses.

Tutors have good subject knowledge and relevant experience. They use their knowledge to plan meaningful on- and off-the-job activities with apprentices. Apprentices analyse their current practice and identify their next steps. Consequently, apprentices have a significantly positive impact on the teams they manage and their businesses. One apprentice and her team have received a nomination for 'team of the year' by their employer.

The apprentices who learn with the subcontractor benefit from easily accessible online resources. They use these to research, submit work and check their progress

against agreed targets. Apprentices produce work of the appropriate standard. Tutors mark work promptly. Apprentices receive useful feedback so that they know how to improve their work and gain higher grades.

Tutors prepare apprentices thoroughly for their final assessments. Tutors introduce professional discussion of management topics in sessions. This increases apprentices' confidence in reflecting accurately on their growing abilities.

Apprentices recruited to the first university-run programme struggled to consolidate knowledge into their long-term memories. This was because theory sessions were too close together, and there was insufficient time to practise their skills in the workplace. Consequently, almost half left the apprenticeship.

The remaining apprentices on the university programme receive helpful support to complete their qualification. Almost all will now complete, but not within the planned timescale. Apprentices on the subcontracted programme are making good progress.

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

Leaders ensure that apprentices are safe. Although leaders have adequate safeguarding procedures in place, they have rightly started to improve their policies and how they work with the human resources department of the university.

Leaders for both the university and the subcontractor apply safer recruitment practices. The designated safeguarding leads are appropriately qualified, and all staff have completed relevant safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training. Managers carry out Disclosure and Barring Service checks, but they do not always update them in line with the university's safeguarding policy.

Apprentices feel safe both at work and during training activities. Staff and apprentices have guidance about to whom they should report concerns. However, this guidance has not been tested. Apprentices know whom to report concerns at work.

Although the university has a 'Prevent' duty action plan, it does not identify the local threats that apprentices may face.

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