

NowSkills Limited

Progress monitoring report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

NowSkills Limited received a new provider monitoring visit in December 2018. At that time, inspectors made progress judgements under three themes.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education and training in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?

Reasonable progress

Since the new provider monitoring visit, senior leaders have appointed a new chair and external members to the board. They have taken appropriate actions to improve most of the weaknesses identified at the previous visit. Leaders recognise that the pace of improvements has been slowed due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders plan an ambitious digital curriculum for apprentices and employers. They deliver apprenticeships at level 3 in digital marketer, infrastructure technician and software development technician and at level 4 in data analyst, information systems business analyst, software developer and network engineer. Leaders link their

curriculum to the skills strategies for the Liverpool and Manchester regions to meet local and regional needs. They match apprentices to their employers and ensure apprentices benefit from an apprentice mentor at work. Leaders and tutors have implemented changes to ensure apprentices reach their potential. For example, tutors individually tailor apprentices' support and one-to-one sessions to prepare them for their assessments. As a result, most apprentices are well prepared and pass their examinations.

Leaders and tutors have improved how they use the assessment of apprentices' prior knowledge and skills to plan the curriculum. Apprentices and employers complete regular assessments of the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices need to develop. Tutors use these to plan learning. For example, tutors use assessments to focus on the development of apprentices' confidence in their use of technical English and mathematics skills relevant to the digital technology industry, such as data interpretation. Consequently, apprentices have a better grasp of both English and mathematics.

Leaders have improved their staff recruitment process to ensure tutors have the relevant technical expertise and industry experience. Tutors are highly qualified and complete regular training to update their knowledge and skills of the digital sector. Many maintain their industry skills using their own blogs, social media posts and websites. As a result, apprentices benefit from knowledgeable tutors who can help them make more rapid progress.

Tutors receive training to develop their planning and teaching to manage online learning. They use new technologies confidently, including resource banks, breakout rooms, chat rooms and screen sharing, to enhance learning for apprentices.

Tutors ensure that they teach the curriculum in a logical order. This helps apprentices learn and remember more. Apprentices build the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to perform their jobs. For example, in digital marketing and infrastructure technician programmes, apprentices learn the basics of effective communication, teamwork and business etiquette from the start, before they move onto more role-specific technical content, such as in the use of social media.

Apprentices have a clear understanding of the benefits the apprenticeship brings to them in their current job roles. They receive careers advice related to their industry. Tutors do not provide apprentices with enough information on wider career progression choices, such as accessing higher education.

Apprentices have training, and are confident, in online safety. They understand about dual levels of authentication and password security. Apprentices use specific software to capture phishing and spam email. They eloquently relate the need for online safety and security to their work. However, although apprentices have been taught about radicalisation and extremism, they do not understand how it links to their lives and job roles.

Leaders have focused on the well-being and welfare of staff and apprentices throughout the pandemic. They have supported apprentices to build their resilience, while keeping centres open to enable apprentices to sit their examinations when ready. As a result, apprentices have not been delayed in their progress towards final assessments.

Apprentices feel very well supported on their programme. They have frequent contacts with their tutors who are available to them out of teaching hours via email and the online student portal. Tutors are flexible, they fit additional support sessions around apprentices' working hours and personal commitments. Apprentices receive helpful tutor feedback to improve the content and the presentation of their work. Tutors do not routinely ensure that their feedback helps apprentices to know how to achieve higher grades.

Employers are positive about the contribution apprentices make to their businesses. They describe the additional tasks and responsibilities apprentices take on as they progress. For example, digital marketing apprentices build websites as they develop their programming skills. Employers ensure apprentices get the time they need to complete their off-the-job training and prepare for their next project or final assessment.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- improve careers information, advice and guidance to ensure apprentices are fully informed of the full range of progression opportunities
- ensure tutors teach apprentices about how the dangers of radicalisation and extremism relate to their work and lives
- ensure tutors routinely provide feedback that helps apprentices understand how to achieve higher grades.

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