

University of Suffolk

Progress monitoring report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

The University of Suffolk was last inspected in March 2020. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education 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?

Insufficient progress

Senior managers do not fulfil all the mandatory requirements of an apprenticeship. They do not complete apprenticeship reviews within stipulated time frames. Apprentices recruited in September have yet to receive a review of their progress in learning. As a result, these apprentices' work-based skills have not been assessed. Apprentices do not know if they are making good progress in developing the knowledge and skills required of their qualification.

The assistant practitioner apprenticeship programme does not meet the apprentices' needs. Many apprentices have a significant amount of experience in their current job role. Apprentices' specific job roles mean they often have limited opportunity to apply new theoretical knowledge to their workplace. In addition, advisers do not help

apprentices translate theoretical learning to their workplace practices effectively. As a result, these apprentices do not develop substantial new knowledge and skills.

Apprentices do not receive impartial careers advice and guidance. Lecturers do not promote the careers guidance available through the university effectively. They do not know what use, if any, apprentices make of the resources available to them to broaden their understanding of the wide-ranging careers available to them. Advisers and lecturers do not systematically discuss apprentices' next steps as part of their ongoing development.

Apprenticeship skills advisers do not review apprentices' progress sufficiently. Too many reviews lack meaningful employer comments. They do not reference the skills and knowledge that apprentices gain at work. Advisers often set generic targets focused on completion of assignment work. They do not focus on apprentices developing and practising their knowledge and skills within the workplace. They do not review apprentices' progress in later reviews. As a result, advisers and apprentices do not have a clear overview of the progress an apprentice is making.

Leaders have ensured that most online learning sessions are effective. Apprentices have had continued access to learning sessions throughout the pandemic. Apprentices attend planned online learning sessions fortnightly. In between, they undertake directed independent study and research. Apprentices have continued to make good progress towards their foundation degree throughout the pandemic.

However, a few lecturers do not teach lessons online effectively. A few lecturers, for example, read out presentations during lessons. Apprentices say that they can easily read these in their own time. Assistant practitioner apprentices feel that online lessons are often too impersonal. They have too little time to discuss the theories being presented with their peers. As a result, these apprentices learn little in these lessons. However, as a result of online learning, most apprentices have continued to make progress. Nursing apprentices benefit from breakout groups and interaction with lecturers.

Lecturers support apprentices through the foundation degree modules very effectively. Lecturers' feedback is highly developmental and useful. They promote the importance of accurate written English skills. As a result, most apprentices produce good-quality academic work. However, too few lecturers set assignments to enable apprentices to apply theory to their own practice. Where assignments do allow for this, most apprentices do so accurately and effectively.

Staff provide good support for apprentices who have a learning difficulty or disability. Apprentices undertake an initial screening to quickly identify any immediate support needs. This is followed by a more detailed assessment. Further support, such as specialist equipment and one-to-one support, is then put in place. Because of the pandemic, managers quickly moved services online. This has ensured that this support remains in place for those apprentices in need.

Staff have worked closely with employer partners to review the nursing associate curriculum. Lecturers sequence modules in a logical order. This enables nursing apprentices to link the theory they learn at university to their job roles. These apprentices develop excellent skills in patient care and clinical practice. They develop their confidence and competence in their clinical roles. This is recognised and valued by their employers. Nursing associates learn how to work in a range of clinical settings. Most assistant practitioner apprentices do not benefit from the same opportunities to develop their wider skills and knowledge.

Senior managers have substantially improved their oversight of the apprenticeship provision. Staff at all levels of the organisation have a better understanding of apprenticeships. Managers have improved the reporting structures to senior leaders. They have enhanced the expertise of staff responsible for the apprenticeship provision.

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

- ensure that assistant practitioner apprentices are able to closely link their theoretical learning to their clinical practice. Advisers must help them identify where and how they can enhance their skills within their current job roles
- make sure that apprentices benefit from effective, impartial careers advice and guidance to enable them to be clear about their wider career choices on completion of their apprenticeship
- ensure that apprentices receive their workplace reviews in a timely way. Advisers must help apprentices identify and understand the progress they are making towards completing their qualification.

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