

Norse Commercial Services Limited

Progress monitoring report

Unique reference number:	1276257
Name of lead inspector:	Rebecca Perry, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Employer
Address:	Norse Group Limited Anson Road Norwich NR6 6ED

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Norse Commercial Services Limited, an employer provider, received a new provider monitoring visit in May 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

Leaders responded rapidly to the changes required as a result of the pandemic. They moved to online learning for all aspects of teaching and coaching. They have ensured that apprentices' progress has not been hindered as a result of the pandemic.

Leaders identified accurate reasons why too many apprentices were not achieving their apprenticeship within planned timescales. Leaders have improved their oversight of the progress that apprentices make. They intervene appropriately and

have implemented an effective policy for those who fall behind. Consequently, more apprentices have achieved their apprenticeship programmes in recent months and fewer are now past their end dates, although achievement remains low.

Leaders have appointed a dedicated functional skills tutor in response to weaknesses identified in this element of the apprenticeship programme. Apprentices requiring these qualifications receive effective tailored support from the functional skills tutor. Leaders have expanded the range of online resources available to support apprentices' achievement. As a result, most apprentices achieve these qualifications.

Leaders have improved the quality of the recruitment and induction of apprentices. For example, they have introduced entry requirements for applicants' levels of English and mathematics. Support is offered for those who do not have the required levels prior to commencing an apprenticeship. Workplace mentors are included in induction sessions. Leaders have strengthened the interview process to ensure that apprentices are placed on an appropriate programme.

Almost all apprentices are employed by the company. The head of service and development has a good oversight of the apprenticeship programmes. She effectively challenges the apprenticeship manager to ensure that improvements are made to the quality of learning. Leaders present accurate performance data to Norse directors. However, directors do not use this information to challenge leaders to improve apprenticeship provision.

Most apprentices on level 3 team leader/supervisor programmes produce written work that meets or exceeds expectations. However, too much written work produced by apprentices on management programmes at level 5 is below the academic standard required. For example, apprentices do not use references within their work and, too often, work is written using informal language.

Coaches provide apprentices with prompt and appropriate developmental feedback on vocational aspects of their work. As a result, apprentices improve their skills and knowledge in managing teams. However, coaches do not consistently reinforce the value of good English skills. They do not help apprentices to improve the quality of their written work to support the essential skills required in more advanced management roles.

Coaches and tutors use discussion and questioning techniques effectively. They encourage apprentices' recall of key theories and self-reflection. Apprentices' learning is reinforced through their application of knowledge in the workplace. Apprentices gain a good understanding of business strategy at Norse, work more accurately with budgets and manage teams more effectively to improve performance.

Staff have designed the apprenticeship programmes to follow a logical order of knowledge elements. Content is structured to build on essential, underpinning knowledge and management theories, moving on to more complex, technical aspects such as budgeting and workplace projects. Staff have reviewed assessment activities

to improve their effectiveness. Apprentices usefully reflect on their new knowledge and skills within the context of their individual work roles.

Coaches do not sufficiently challenge apprentices to make rapid progress, for example to meet submission targets. Coaches are very supportive and listen attentively to their apprentices. They provide effective welfare and pastoral support to ensure that apprentices are coping with the current national restrictions and new ways of working. However, they are too accepting of the workplace pressures which affect timescales in completing assignments. They do not challenge workplace managers to prioritise apprentices' learning over the pressures of the business.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient careers advice and guidance as part of their apprenticeship. Coaches provide careers guidance at the end of the programme in final reviews and in group sessions on career development at Norse. However, ongoing and impartial advice and guidance is lacking from the curriculum.

Mentors and managers in the workplace effectively support apprentices to apply their new skills and knowledge. Mentors and apprentices meet frequently to discuss what apprentices are learning and to help them find opportunities to apply new skills within the workplace, such as experience of recruitment.

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

- ensure that coaches have sufficiently high expectations of apprentices and challenge them, alongside apprentices' workplace managers, to complete their apprenticeship within planned timescales
- ensure that coaches and trainers promote the importance of written English skills to enable apprentices to improve their professional practices in written communication
- provide apprentices with appropriate and impartial careers advice and guidance.

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Store Street
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