

Nottinghamshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Employer

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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.

Nottinghamshire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority began to offer the level 3 standards-based operational firefighter apprenticeship from September 2019. There are currently nine apprentices in learning. Before this, the authority was a subcontracted provider for a local college. Managers have considerable experience in operational firefighter development.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Senior leaders have a strong rationale for training new employees to reach a nationally accredited standard through the apprenticeship. The apprenticeship forms a key part of the authority's widening participation strategy, to successfully attract under-represented groups into the fire service. Managers recruit apprentices to meet the needs of the local and regional context. They follow fully the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.

Managers ensure apprentices gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours by planning and implementing an effective curriculum. Initial training comprehensively covers the main competencies of the firefighter role. This includes intensive, well-planned theoretical and practical work. Learning is carefully scaffolded and extended. Apprentices have time to practise their skills until they reach a high level of competence before their next phase of training. Staff set exacting standards and are ambitious about what apprentices can achieve.

Managers ensure apprentices thoroughly review their learning after a year in training. This allows them to monitor their retention of knowledge and skills over

time, and, if needed, to fill any gaps through further training. Additional off-the-job training prepares apprentices well for their final assessment.

Trainers have significant fire fighter experience and work as supervisory managers. They undertake extensive sector-specific updates and have teaching qualifications that allow them to perform their roles very effectively. Apprentices use excellent resources to develop their skills. They deal with different types of fire, work at height and use breathing apparatus in different training scenarios. These realistically replicate incidents apprentices will face on the job.

Managers have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. Self-assessment is self-critical and includes decisive actions to bring about improvements. External governance is provided at a strategic level through the Fire Authority. Although oversight is provided by senior leaders, robust internal scrutiny is not yet fully integrated into quality assurance systems.

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

Apprentices' prior learning, physical and practical skills are thoroughly assessed before they start the apprenticeship. They quickly learn the core competencies and knowledge they need to be able to join a Watch as a trainee firefighter. Once in role, they gain experience to deal with more challenging situations.

The sequence of the apprenticeship is clear and logical. In the initial stage, trainers break down competencies into manageable topics to help apprentices make swift progress. They teach core skills, including the use of ladders and how to be a first responder. Once at the station, apprentices follow a detailed framework to develop their knowledge and skills further. This takes place through a combination of well planned on- and off-the-job training.

Apprentices are assessed frequently. They receive extensive verbal feedback from their managers. This helps them master the wide-ranging aspects of the role. Areas for development are not routinely captured in observations. This limits the opportunity to identify areas an apprentice may need support with. Apprentices are well prepared for their final assessment through revision sessions and mock tests. They have access to high-quality online materials, which support their learning.

Trainers do not focus enough on the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills. Apprentices do not recognise that they need to continue to develop these skills as part of their studies.

Apprentices have weekly meetings with their manager to review their progress. This helps them to stay on track. Apprentices who fall behind are very well supported to catch up quickly. Apprentices benefit from progress reviews with their assessor and manager every six weeks. However, these focus more on the percentage of the qualification that has been completed rather than the underpinning learning.

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

Staff maintain a strong safeguarding and welfare culture. Appropriate procedures are in place to assess risks and manage safeguarding referrals. Managers ensure staff are recruited safely.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) receives suitable training for the role. Staff have a good awareness of local risks and their potential impact on apprentices' experiences. Apprentices are well informed. For example, the DSL shares case studies to raise awareness about mental health and the fire risks associated with hoarding.

Managers complete a 'Prevent' duty action plan that captures key local and regional issues. This needs to be further embedded into apprentices' training. A few apprentices would like to understand more about how to identify signs of radicalisation.

Apprentices feel safe and have access to a comprehensive range of support. Trained mentors offer ongoing personal and professional guidance. Apprentices can seek the support of a counsellor, occupational health professional and service chaplain. Those who have experienced traumatic events are swiftly signposted for specialist support.

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