

Functional Skills UK Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Judy Lye-Forster, Her Majesty's Inspector

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Address: Unit 2b
Gordon Mews
Gordon Close
Portslade
Brighton
BN41 1HU

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.

Functional Skills UK Limited (FS UK) started to train apprentices in September 2019. Currently, there are 19 levy-funded apprentices. The majority of apprentices are aged 19 to 23 years, however, five apprentices are aged 16 to 18. One apprentice is on the personal trainer apprenticeship framework at level 3. All other apprentices are studying standards at level 2 or level 3. Ten of these are on the level 2 leisure team member standard, five are on the level 3 leisure duty manager standard, two are on the level 2 community activator coach standard and one is on the personal trainer standard at level 3. At this visit, four apprentices were at the end of their training and awaiting their final assessment.

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?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have a well-considered rationale for the apprenticeships they provide. Their specialist knowledge and understanding of the leisure industry and the needs of sector employers has resulted in the development of an ambitious curriculum for apprentices. Staff are well qualified and have extensive experience in the industry.

Managers work closely with employers to involve them in planning apprentices' training, so that it meets the specific needs of their business. For example, an employer requested food safety and water testing to be added to their apprentices' training. Managers support employers to recruit appropriate apprenticeship candidates. Staff carefully assess the prior experience of each candidate to ensure they will gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours on an apprenticeship.

Managers set clear expectations with both employers and apprentices through comprehensive commitment statements and apprenticeship agreements. As a result, both the employer and apprentice know from the start what is required of them and what they can expect from FS UK.

Apprentices off-the-job training is planned effectively at the start. It is scheduled throughout the course to align carefully to the needs of the employer and apprentice, to develop the apprentices' skills in line with the increased responsibilities they have at work.

Leaders are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision and have put in place appropriate actions to resolve the areas that require improvement. For example, apprentices receive helpful and effective careers advice and guidance at the start and end of their training, but leaders recognise that they now need to provide more formalised ongoing support and guidance throughout this period.

A newly formed board of governors provides scrutiny and challenge to the leadership team and oversees the quality of apprentices' training. It is too early to judge its impact.

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 develop valuable new knowledge and skills which improve their competence. As a result, they have a positive impact on their employers' business. Apprentices grow in confidence as they apply their new skills and knowledge, taking on additional responsibilities at work. For example, leading swimming classes independently, testing pool water or administering first aid in a COVID-safe way.

Tutors plan apprentices' training in a sensible order so that it builds the apprentices' knowledge and skills over time. Apprentices work is of a high standard. They are proud of the work they have produced and the qualifications they have achieved. Tutors generally provide feedback that help apprentices improve and develop their knowledge and understanding further.

Apprentices benefit from frequent reviews with their tutors, many of these are also attended by their managers. As a result, apprentices and managers are aware of the progress that apprentices are making and what their next steps are. Tutors use these reviews effectively to get apprentices to reflect on what they have learned and make links with what they do at work. The targets that apprentices are set to achieve are mainly task based, and do not identify the skills or knowledge they need to further develop.

Apprentices are well prepared for their final assessment and have a comprehensive understanding of what is required. They are confident and aiming for merit and

distinction grades. Apprentices highly value the support of FS UK staff over the past year as they have been able to continue learning and making progress, despite the industry closures.

Apprentices who need to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics benefit from teaching by qualified and experienced staff. Apprentices who are not required to achieve English and mathematics qualifications are offered additional voluntary courses to develop these skills further. However, staff do not routinely plan to develop apprentices' English and mathematics further as part of their training programme.

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

Leaders and managers effectively promote safeguarding across the organisation and prioritise the health and well-being of their apprentices. All staff share responsibility for safeguarding and have been appropriately trained. Leaders have suitable staff recruitment checks in place.

The designated safeguarding leads ensure that all apprentices and staff are kept up to date with current safeguarding priorities and issues. For example, during the pandemic apprentices and staff received additional support and training about mental health. Several of them trained as mental health first aiders.

Apprentices feel safe and know who to speak to if they have any concerns. They value the frequent electronic updates and reminders they receive from staff and are knowledgeable about safeguarding topics. FS UK and the employers work closely together to ensure that apprentices are trained in safeguarding and health and safety so they can keep themselves and others safe in the workplace.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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