

SEP Educational Services Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Saul Pope Her Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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.

At the time of the visit, SEP Educational Services Limited (SEP) had seventeen apprentices, all on standards-based programmes. All apprentices transferred from another provider in 2019.

Most apprentices follow either the level 3 business administrator apprenticeship or the level 4 associate project manager apprenticeship. A very small number study commercial procurement and supply at level 4. The provider does not use subcontractors for any of its apprenticeship work.

All apprentices study remotely. 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?

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have not developed training programmes that meet all the requirements of an apprenticeship. For example, staff only have vague details regarding apprentices' starting points. As a result, tutors have not been able to plan training effectively or monitor the progress that apprentices make.

Leaders and managers have not designed apprenticeship programmes in conjunction with employers. Employers are not aware, for example, of their employees' training plans. Consequently, apprentices have not undertaken sufficient or high-quality off-the-job training. Apprentices rightly complain about a lack of off-the-job training during their studies. They feel frustrated that, on some occasions, they have had to search the internet for information rather than benefit from tutor-led support.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that apprentices and their employers understand what apprentices need to do at end-point assessment. Apprentices at level 3 wrongly believe that they only need to complete their workbook to pass their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers do not have sufficient oversight of apprentices' progress on their programmes. They do not, for example, monitor apprentices' progress closely enough to quickly identify those that are making very slow progress. On a few occasions, staff are unsure as to whether apprentices are on furlough or back at work.

Leaders and managers rightly recognise that there are numerous shortcomings within their apprenticeship provision. They identify, for example, that they need to appoint a senior leader with direct responsibility for apprenticeships, and a governance board to hold leaders to account for apprenticeships' performance. They have very recently put into place actions to make these improvements, although it is too early to judge the impact of these.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have placed insufficient focus on ensuring that apprentices' courses are of high enough quality. Leaders have not, for example, monitored teaching or assessment activities, or reviewed the quality of apprentices' written assignments. Leaders recognise that their oversight has not been good enough, and have put into place plans to improve this.

Tutors do not assess apprentices' progress thoroughly enough. Level 3 business administrator and level 4 commercial procurement and supply apprentices have not received feedback that identifies, for example, their strengths and areas for improvement. In addition, the large majority of apprentices have completed very limited review activities with their tutors.

Apprentices do not develop sufficient knowledge, skills or behaviours that meet their workplace needs. Level 3 business administrator apprentices do not believe that the apprenticeship is improving their work performance. Level 4 associate project manager apprentices submit written work that is below the required standard.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient support to develop their English and mathematics skills. Leaders and managers have not appointed specialist staff to teach these subjects, and do not enable apprentices to study functional skills qualifications. The few apprentices that need to gain these qualifications to complete their apprenticeships have had to find and complete these with other providers.

Leaders and managers have made recent staffing changes that have had some

positive impact on apprentices. For example, newly appointed tutors are diligent, well qualified and experienced. Apprentices rightly feel that they are better supported by their current tutors than they were in the past. However, leaders have been slow to recognise and rectify many of the issues that apprentices have faced.

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

Leaders ensure that there are appropriate safeguarding processes in place to support apprentices. The designated safeguarding lead and their deputy have suitable qualifications and experience for their roles. Tutors also undertake relevant safeguarding training, for example on the 'Prevent' duty. They update training frequently, and show a good understanding of safeguarding-related themes, such as the risks of extremism.

Leaders also ensure that processes for reporting safeguarding concerns are appropriate. Staff at all levels understand these thoroughly. Leaders and managers have also ensured that SEP has appropriate safer recruitment processes. Apprentices rightly feel safe when they are undertaking training. They know who to contact at the provider if they have a safeguarding concern.

Leaders and managers recognise that they have not focused enough on providing apprentices with safeguarding-related information during their programmes. Apprentices remember covering topics, such as the dangers of radicalisation or e-safety, at the beginning of their programmes, but only vaguely recall details of these.

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