

Decoded Limited

Monitoring visit report

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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.

Decoded Limited (Decoded) was founded in 2011 as a commercial training provider of digital skills training. Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy in 2017, Decoded gained a direct contract to deliver apprenticeships in data analytics. At the time of the monitoring visit, Decoded trains 589 apprentices, all of whom are completing the level 4 data analyst standard.

Since March 2020, Decoded have been teaching and providing support to all of their apprentices online, in response to the restrictions necessitated by COVID-19 (coronavirus).

The impact of COVID-19 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

Senior leaders have a clear mission to reduce the digital skills gap in the UK. Their selection of the level 4 data analyst standard meets this aim well and meets the requirements of the employers with whom they work. Apprentices achieve highly in their apprenticeship. While only a small number have completed their programme to date, all have passed, and a large proportion have achieved distinction grades.

Senior leaders have taken appropriate actions to ensure that the requirements of an apprenticeship programme are met. Leaders have communicated clearly the obligations of all parties through a comprehensive commitment statement and as a result, apprentices receive their entitlement to effective off-the-job training.

Senior leaders have employed highly qualified staff to teach their apprentices. Leaders train staff to develop their teaching skills and their subject-specific knowledge to ensure that the knowledge taught remains current in a fast-evolving field.

Senior leaders recruit apprentices with integrity, using a good range of activities including a review of apprentices' subject-specific skills and experience. Middle leaders use a comprehensive approach to tracking apprentices' progress which allows them to identify quickly any apprentices at risk of falling behind and take steps to support them.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Decoded's apprenticeship provision. They are well qualified for their role and have a broad range of applicable experience which they use to support and challenge senior leaders effectively.

Senior leaders have developed the training well so that apprentices learn the technical knowledge related to data analytics. However, staff do not explicitly focus on teaching apprentices new skills and developing their behaviours at work. Recently, leaders have introduced methods of assessing apprentices' skills and behaviours at work through professional discussions and witness testimonies. However, it is too early to see the benefit of teachers using the outcomes of these assessments to coach the apprentices whom they support.

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 substantial new knowledge through their programme which they use to improve their performance at work. For example, apprentices are able to use their new knowledge of programming languages to identify and resolve quality issues in data used by their team.

Leaders have designed a curriculum which allows apprentices to build on their knowledge over time. Teachers start by teaching foundation knowledge, such as basic statistics and programming. They then progress to more complex knowledge, for example data acquisition and clustering. Leaders are ambitious for their learners and teach apprentices content beyond that required by the apprenticeship standard, for instance how to code in Python.

Teachers use their subject expertise to good effect in lessons by providing apprentices clear explanations of new knowledge. Teachers accurately assess what apprentices have learned by asking questions which apprentices answer using the online chat function.

Mentors hold quarterly review meetings with apprentices and their line managers in which they set apprentices targets for the next quarter. This frequent communication between mentors and employers ensures that employers are kept well informed of their apprentices' progress.

Assessors provide useful feedback to apprentices on their written work which they use to make improvements. However, assessors do not routinely identify errors in apprentices' spelling, punctuation or grammar and as such apprentices do not always know how to put these right.

Mentors do not collect first-hand evidence of apprentices' development of skills and behaviours in the workplace. At times, during reviews, line managers do not provide feedback on how apprentices are performing. In these cases, mentors are unable to support apprentices to develop in these areas.

While staff do a thorough assessment of what apprentices already know at the start of their programme, they do not use this information adequately. For instance, they do not revisit the benchmarks taken to determine where progress has been made and where additional support may be required.

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

Leaders provide their staff and governors with appropriate safeguarding training which includes the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Staff have a thorough understanding of safeguarding and 'Prevent' and know how to identify and report any signs of harm. Apprentices feel safe and know to whom they should report any concerns should they arise.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding keep appropriate records of safeguarding concerns, which include details of the appropriate and proportionate actions they take to support apprentices.

Leaders have put in place appropriate safeguarding policies and risk assessments. However, leaders do not fully reflect the current practices of the business, the current risks to apprentices and the mitigations they have put in place within these documents.

Leaders responsible for safeguarding do not have a secure understanding of the location in which their apprentices currently work. As such, they are unable to assess accurately the risks that apprentices may face during the working day.

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