

Bedford Borough Council

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	50636
Name of lead inspector:	Michael Worgs, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Community Learning and Skills - Local Authority
Address:	138 Cauldwell Street Bedford MK42 9AP

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.

Bedford Borough Council is a community learning and skills provider that offers apprenticeships through the Bedford Training Assessment Centre (BTAC). BTAC registered as a main provider in 2018 to provide apprenticeships internally to Bedford borough employees and externally to levy-paying organisations. BTAC specialises in standard-based and framework-based apprenticeships in the health and social care sector.

BTAC offers apprenticeships in level 2 adult health and social care, level 3 adult health and social care, level 5 adult health and social care, level 3 residential care, level 3 supporting teaching and learning in schools and level 2 early years and education. At the time of the visit, 45 apprentices were on programmes, 34 of which were adult health and social care apprenticeships. There are no learners in receipt of high needs funding and the provider has no subcontractors.

Apprentices have been significantly affected by the national pandemic as most apprentices work in the health and social care sector. Apprentices have experienced various health problems, which have resulted in a few breaks in learning.

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 ensure that the planned programmes meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. For example, they have a thorough recruitment and vetting process to ensure apprentices are recruited with integrity. As a result, apprentices and employers have clear expectations of on-the-job and off-the-job training requirements.

Most apprentices have not completed their apprenticeship within the planned time frame. This has been due to the pressures of the pandemic and delays in being able to take functional skills exams. Leaders are taking steps to deal with this issue, but it is too early to see any impact.

Leaders have designed an effective curriculum with employers to enable apprentices to swiftly develop skills relevant to their job roles. For example, assessors ensure that adult care apprentices have a workplace mentor, and the work placements offer apprentices a wide range of opportunities, such as developing and implementing care plans. As a result, most apprentices have completed their relevant care certificates and can confidently apply their new skills in the workplace.

Leaders have well-qualified staff who use their expertise to provide effective training to apprentices. For example, all assessors have the relevant qualifications for teaching and assessing apprentices, along with sector-specific experience. As a result, most apprentices benefit from a well-planned programme tailored to their individual needs.

Leaders do not have effective governance arrangement in place to scrutinise the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They have introduced a new governance panel, but it is too early to see the impact of this.

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

Assessors do not effectively develop apprentices' functional skills. Apprentices do not regard their functional skills development as an integral part of the programme. Most apprentices carry out extensive self-directed learning in English and mathematics and subsequently sit multiple retakes of external examinations. Apprentices do not develop sufficient digital skills throughout their apprenticeship.

Apprentices receive high-quality, off-the-job training from well-experienced and qualified assessors. Assessors use their vocational expertise to ensure that apprentices make explicit links between their theoretical learning and their job roles. For example, adult care apprentices use their knowledge about the legislative framework for informed consent very effectively. They are confident when advocating the rights of their service users and when involved in decision-making while working alongside district nurses. As a result, most apprentices are confident in how to care for their service users depending on their individual needs.

Apprentices develop a wide range of new knowledge and relevant skills that improve the support they give to children and their families. For example, early years and education apprentices have a greater depth of knowledge about children's development and how their experiences shape their behaviours. They understand

how drugs misuse during pregnancy might affect foetal development, and the impact this can have on parents and family dynamics.

Assessors provide effective support to ensure that apprentices remain on programme despite the personal challenges and workplace pressures experienced by apprentices throughout the national pandemic. For example, a few apprentices have had health-related breaks in their learning. Assessors have been very supportive in making adjustments for these apprentices. These adjustments allow these apprentices to complete their coursework, and support their therapeutic needs. As a result, retention remains high, and most apprentices who complete their qualification are achieving high grades.

Assessors do not use reviews to effectively monitor progress and define specific actions to drive swift progress. Assessors focus on unit and task completion rather than recognising the wider skills that apprentices need to develop.

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

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding within the organisation. They have a well-qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) who uses her experience to maintain high expectations for safeguarding. All staff receive extensive training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values. The DSL maintains strong safeguarding links with external agencies and local schools.

Apprentices feel safe and understand how to keep themselves safe. They make very effective use of their new knowledge and safeguarding skills to maintain high expectations for the safety and well-being of their service users and themselves. Apprentices use their safeguarding knowledge to train their service users to use the internet safely. They have an extensive understanding of potential risks, such as grooming for sexual exploitation, and radical views. Apprentices use their knowledge about cultural and religious differences to help their service users understand and respect the religious beliefs of their peers.

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