

Abellio East Midlands Limited

Monitoring visit report

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| Name of lead inspector: | Helen Whelan, Her Majesty's Inspector |
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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.

Abellio East Midlands, operating as East Midlands Railway, is a rail franchise passenger transport service. Abellio began to offer standards-based apprenticeships from March 2020 as an employer provider for East Midlands Railway employees and to employees of other training organisations. There are currently 49 apprentices in learning. Six follow the level 2 passenger transport onboard or station team member apprenticeship. The remainder are level 3 train driver apprentices. All apprentices are aged over 24.

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 respond well to the skills gaps that are emerging due to the changes in the rail industry, particularly the increased use of technology. They use apprenticeships to recruit a more representative, diverse workforce in train driving and passenger transportation.

The curriculum is ambitious and gives apprentices a detailed understanding of the rail industry beyond their current role. Apprenticeships are linked closely to industry requirements with frequent reference to rules and regulations. In addition, apprentices cover extra materials to deepen their knowledge of the rail sector, such as train drivers learning about the role of a guard. Managers also recognise that many apprentices enter the profession as a second career. As apprentices do not have experience of the challenges of a train driver's lifestyle, trainers cover study skills and the impact of the job on mental health.

Employers understand what happens during apprentices' off-the-job training and link this well to their own training and mentoring. They value the structure and rigour which the apprenticeship provides. Managers give employers the opportunity to update training to meet their needs.

Trainers are highly experienced in the rail sector. They have trainer and assessor qualifications that support them to teach well. Managers organise monthly standardisation events, so trainers can share good practice and learn how to use online teaching tools effectively. Apprentices have access to effective resources. These include a train simulator, 360-degree immersive screen and retail room. Trainers use these well to replicate real-life rail scenarios.

Managers have a sound understanding of the provision's strengths and what needs to improve. Improvement strategies need to be considered in greater detail. Leaders have recently introduced a governing board to provide oversight of the quality of apprenticeships. It is too early to judge the impact of these arrangements.

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

Apprenticeships are structured logically. Train drivers start with foundation topics and everyday operational aspects such as train preparation, speed restrictions and signalling. They then learn how to deal with major disruption or incidents. The theory-heavy approach at the beginning of the course ensures that apprentices can work safely.

Trainers helpfully weave practical elements into theory lessons. For example, they include training on shunting to prepare apprentices for the subsequent practical mentor-led aspect of the course. They also train apprentices for emergency situations. Apprentices value the positive impact this has on their practice.

Trainers use sessions effectively to recap challenging topics. They are exacting when it comes to assessing the quality of apprentices' responses. For example, they ask follow-up questions, use other apprentices' responses, or recognise that a subject needs further attention. Trainers do not always take the opportunity to check that apprentices are following their presentations closely enough.

Assessment of apprentices' progress is rigorous. Trainers undertake frequent knowledge checks, for example at the end of each topic, as well as formal timed assessments. As a result, current apprentices are making expected progress.

Apprentices receive helpful, timely feedback on assessed work. Trainers could use written feedback more effectively to enable apprentices to further develop their understanding.

English, mathematics and information and communication technology are not well integrated into the apprenticeships. Apprentices study 'fast track' functional skills at a local college at the start of their course. They do not see the relevance of these courses. Learning is not placed within the context of the rail industry or reinforced by trainers later in the apprenticeship.

Apprentices have a limited grasp of the components of their final assessment. Managers should consider ways to support apprentices to better understand and prepare for this.

Managers have effective quality assurance arrangements in place. These include reviewing lessons and training resources and gathering feedback from apprentices.

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

Leaders maintain a culture of safeguarding across the organisation. Apprentices have access to a wide range of welfare resources. These include a positive mental health application on their phone and occupational health support. Apprentices feel safe and well supported.

A well-qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) receives appropriate training to perform the role effectively. The DSL ensures that trainers are kept up to date on safeguarding matters. Apprentices identify who they would contact if they had a safeguarding concern.

A comprehensive set of policies is maintained and reviewed to manage safeguarding matters. Staff are recruited using safe practices.

Apprentices recall covering various safeguarding issues such as radicalisation, extremist views, British values and online safety at the start of their course. Trainers helpfully place discussions around safeguarding within the rail context. For example, apprentices understand the importance of identifying and reporting potentially vulnerable members of the public or spotting suspicious packages or behaviours.

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