

The Link Training Academy Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 2556365

Name of lead inspector: Hayley Lomas, Her Majesty's Inspector

Inspection dates: 26–27 May 2021

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 the Education and Skills Funding Agency 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.

The Link Training Academy was established in 2011. In 2019, it received its first directly funded contract to train apprentices. At the time of the visit, there were 44 apprentices on standards-based programmes. Of these, 34 were on the level 2 hair professionals programme, of whom seven were on the barbering pathway. The remainder were on level 3 hair creation, level 3 business administration, level 3 team leader and level 5 management programmes.

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?

Significant progress

Leaders use their extensive industrial experience to develop and provide high-quality apprenticeships in hairdressing, barbering and business administration. They work very closely with employers to ensure that the curriculum enables apprentices to develop the skills, knowledge and behaviours that they need to be successful in their job roles. For example, they prioritise the teaching of specific tasks to match employers' business requirements.

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the many strengths and the few weaknesses of their provision. They have established effective governance arrangements. Those who act in a governance capacity have a range of relevant and useful skills and experience, which they use to hold leaders to account.

Staff provide apprentices with a comprehensive recruitment and induction into the apprenticeship. They make sure that employers are fully involved in the selection process, and that apprentices in hairdressing and barbering benefit from useful

taster days in the training centre and in salons. As a result, apprentices work in salons that match their interests and career goals. In business administration, leaders carry out rigorous assessments to assure themselves that apprentices will benefit from the training and will learn substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Leaders make sure that employers are committed to meeting their obligations to the apprentices' training programme. The commitment statements provide employers with a thorough plan for the on-the-job training, which clearly outlines the way in which they need to support apprentices to develop their skills and behaviours. As a result, apprentices develop their confidence quickly. Hairdressing apprentices rapidly develop their skills to provide clients with accurate consultations, and they master techniques which employers value highly.

Leaders ensure that the vast majority of apprentices benefit from high-quality off-the-job training. They have invested in a very well resourced training centre and a working salon, which tutors make good use of when they teach hairdressing and barbering apprentices.

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

Tutors identify the starting points of apprentices accurately and use this information well to plan individual programmes for apprentices. This supports apprentices to make rapid progress. For example, hairdressing apprentices who have previously worked in salons in another role have their programme amended to reflect the skills that they already have in customer service.

Tutors are suitably qualified and have significant experience in their vocational subjects. They keep up to date with industry practice, and tutors in hairdressing continue to work in the industry. Tutors in barbering teach apprentices to carry out skin fades, which are in high demand from clients, and hairdressing apprentices learn to use the weaving technique when fitting extensions. The business administration tutors completed a management training programme with one employer to make sure that they had a thorough knowledge of the business. This has enabled staff to plan a curriculum that meets the apprentices' and employers' needs.

Tutors provide excellent learning support to apprentices. They identify apprentices' support needs accurately by using specialist software, and implement effective teaching strategies to enable apprentices to make good progress.

Tutors use a range of assessment activities effectively to check apprentices' understanding. They ask apprentices challenging questions to identify gaps in knowledge, and observe them completing practical tasks. Tutors give helpful

feedback so that apprentices are clear about what they need to do to improve.

Tutors and employers provide helpful information to apprentices to support them in planning their next steps. Apprentices are clear about the career options available to them and what they need to do to achieve their aspirations. For example, hairdressing apprentices who plan to open their own salons have a good understanding of what is required to be self-employed. Business administration apprentices who aspire to become managers in the NHS know what further qualifications and experience they will need to fulfil their career goal.

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

Leaders have implemented rigorous procedures to ensure that apprentices are kept safe. Apprentices know whom to report concerns to, both in the training centre and in the workplace. Staff take appropriate action when apprentices report safeguarding issues which, in a few cases, are very serious in nature.

Tutors provide apprentices with helpful information about safeguarding so that apprentices have a good understanding of the risks in the workplace and in the communities in which they live. Hairdressing apprentices learn about the dangers of local issues, such as knife crime and gang culture. However, apprentices in business administration do not have a good enough awareness of local safeguarding risks.

Staff have an acute awareness of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hairdressing and barbering apprentices. They provide apprentices with useful information about mental health awareness, domestic abuse and healthy eating, and make regular checks on apprentices' well-being.

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