

Hills Bridge Services Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	2577255
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Type of provider:	Employer
Address:	Rainham House New Road Rainham Essex RM13 8RA

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.

Hills Bridge Services Ltd is an employer provider. At the time of the visit, there were 109 apprentices on the level 2 rail engineering operative apprenticeship standard. All apprentices were over the age of 18. Hills Bridge Services Ltd became an approved apprenticeship training provider in 2019. Leaders provide maintenance and repair services for a range of companies within the rail sector. Apprentices are recruited via referrals from a local prison and charitable organisations working with disadvantaged and vulnerable adults. Apprentices continued working and learning throughout the pandemic.

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 have not ensured that the programme meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. They have taken on learners who are not eligible for an apprenticeship. Leaders do not have appropriate commitment statements in place. Too many apprentices have never had a progress review, despite being on programme for over a year. Apprentices do not have workplace mentors.

Leaders have not considered functional skills within the programme. They are not aware of the proportion of apprentices who require these qualifications, and no apprentices have received teaching, or support, towards achieving these.

Apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship. Over half of the apprentices have finished their training and moved on to other employers without completing their final assessments. Leaders do not ensure that trainers continue to support these apprentices to retain and reinforce their learning, and they do not know how many

will return for the assessments. Trainers and apprentices are not aware of the requirements of final assessments.

Arrangements for governance are not effective. Senior leaders are highly knowledgeable and experienced in the rail sector. However, they do not have sufficient knowledge or understanding of apprenticeships. They do not hold managers to account for the quality of the full apprenticeship programme. The new apprenticeship manager has identified accurately weaknesses in the provision. However, managers' actions to remedy these have been too recently introduced to have had an impact.

Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and assessment effectively. Leaders use performance management appropriately to remedy staff underperformance. Trainers meet frequently to review the technical curriculum. They share strategies to successfully help apprentices who have fallen behind with the vocational aspects of their programme. Managers provide useful support for trainers to further develop their vocational and teaching skills.

Leaders ensure that the vocational curriculum is broad, and well informed by employer demands. Leaders have contracts for maintenance and repair work with a large range of different employers within the rail sector. These contracts inform the curriculum and enable apprentices to build their skills on site. They include many aspects of rail work, such as track-laying, track works, station repairs and heritage rail.

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 quickly gain useful knowledge from working within the rail industry. They identify, describe and select the right tools for a variety of practical jobs. They understand the importance of, and can undertake, routine maintenance, for example the replacement of fishplates that hold rails together.

Trainers closely monitor apprentices' progress in gaining new skills and knowledge. Apprentices gain the additional qualifications required to work in the rail industry. For example, the lookout qualification enables apprentices to hold higher levels of responsibility in managing health and safety in the workplace. They gain essential health and safety, manual handling, first-aid and rail-saw certificates. However, trainers do not monitor apprentices' overall progress. Consequently, no apprentices have completed their full apprenticeship.

Trainers check apprentices' knowledge effectively. They ask questions throughout practical activities to check apprentices' understanding and to help apprentices extend their knowledge. They help apprentices consolidate theoretical knowledge in

practical environments through their questioning, for example when asking apprentices to explain risks and to justify their chosen techniques.

Staff have extensive knowledge of the rail sector. They have many years' experience working in different aspects of the sector between them. They maintain currency and licences to work track-side. Trainers have appropriate teaching and assessing qualifications.

Trainers sequence the vocational curriculum so that new knowledge and skills build on what apprentices know and can do. Trainers manage practical training skilfully. Trainers ensure that apprentices develop applied English and mathematical skills. For example, apprentices accurately complete calculations for the area of complex shapes and volumes related to their working context, such as to estimate quantities of concrete.

Trainers use their extensive knowledge of the industry to provide highly effective careers advice and guidance to apprentices. They ensure that apprentices understand the breadth of careers available within the rail sector, such as signalling, electrical or platform work. Apprentices also understand how their skills could transfer to other sectors, such as construction, welding, and painting and decorating. Despite not completing final assessments, apprentices progress to stable careers within the rail industry. Almost all remain with Hillsbridge as technicians or move into permanent roles with other large rail companies.

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

Leaders have not ensured that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place. No staff have received training in safeguarding or the 'Prevent' duty. Trainers do not understand their safeguarding responsibilities.

Staff do not deal with disclosures appropriately or know how to spot signs of vulnerability. Leaders do not log concerns about apprentices' welfare and do not have arrangements in place for dealing with them.

Leaders do not follow safer recruitment practices. Leaders identify appropriate staff for Disclosure and Barring Service checks, but do not ensure that these are in place prior to staff working with vulnerable apprentices.

Apprentices do not know how to report concerns about their, or others', well-being. They do not know about the risks of radicalisation and extremism or understand how these risks apply to them.

Apprentices work safely when they are track-side. They adhere to strict safe working practices. Apprentices have a particularly good understanding of health and safety.

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