

University of Keele

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 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 University of Keele is a higher education institution based in Keele, Staffordshire. The university was approved to begin delivering apprenticeships in 2017 and began teaching the first group of apprentices in 2018. At the time of the visit there were 117 apprentices in learning, all following standards. Two were following the advanced clinical practitioner standard at level 7, 16 were following the data scientist standard at level 6, 13 were following the nursing associate standard at level 5, 16 were following the registered nurse standard at level 6, 60 were following the senior leader standard at level 7, and 10 apprentices were following the academic professional standard at level 7.

During the pandemic, the university moved the majority of apprenticeship teaching online, and agreed breaks in learning for a significant number of apprentices working within National Health Service (NHS) trusts. Many of these are now beginning to return to their studies.

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 have developed apprenticeships in response to the skills needs of the communities they serve. For example, following the creation of a new job role within the NHS - nursing associate - the level 5 apprenticeship was developed to address the recruitment needs of the local NHS trust into this role; and the development of the registered nurse standard at level 6 was created to offer apprentices progression routes into careers in nursing.

Leaders have ensured that the apprenticeships they have developed attract those who will benefit most. For example, the nursing associate apprenticeship at level 5 offers a route into the profession for apprentices who would not normally be able to start their career through the more traditional route.

Leaders have structured the management of apprenticeships as a cross-institution group, ensuring that the overall quality of apprenticeships offered within different faculties is monitored and developed centrally. As a result, they are able to disseminate best practice to all areas of apprenticeship delivery and ensure a consistent approach is taken to the quality assurance of apprenticeships across the university.

Leaders and managers have recruited a qualified and experienced team to manage and teach apprenticeships. They also regularly sought both internal and external advice to ensure the principles of the apprenticeship are being met.

Leaders work well with employers to ensure that under-represented groups are encouraged to participate in apprenticeships. For example, they are currently working with one employer to encourage more female apprentices into data science and, as a result, have a higher than average number of female apprentice enrolments onto the level 6 data scientist programme.

Governors are actively involved in detailed reviews of apprenticeships to deepen their understanding and to look closely at the areas for development. They use this information well to take rapid action to resolve issues that may arise and to hold leaders to account.

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

Leaders work closely with employers to develop continually the curriculum to meet the needs of employers. For example, following consultation with employers, teachers of the senior leader apprenticeship are developing modules to underpin skills for business survival and economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, apprentices develop highly relevant skills and knowledge reflective of current and future issues.

Tutors use the starting points of apprentices effectively to recognise prior learning and develop a learning plan to ensure apprentices develop significant new skills. For example, some apprentices following the nursing associate apprenticeship undertake a fast-track route and complete additional modules to fill gaps in their skills and knowledge.

Apprentices following the senior leader apprenticeship use the skills and knowledge they develop to make progress in their careers and develop the businesses in which they work. For example, some apprentices have received promotions to leadership roles, and others have developed new strategic approaches in the workplace, enabling them to grow their business into new areas.

Leaders have implemented rigorous quality assurance for apprenticeships. This is adapted at faculty level to reflect the needs of individual programmes and informs wider university quality processes. For example, the validation of apprenticeships follows the standard university process, with additional rigour applied by chairs of validation panels, who possess a background in apprenticeships.

Tutors and teachers ensure that employers have a clear understanding of the progress apprentices are making. They conduct monthly meetings with employers in addition to apprentices' reviews. Where apprentices have fallen behind or have taken a break in learning, tutors ensure that employers are aware of clear plans to help apprentices achieve their apprenticeship.

Tutors have not ensured that all apprentices are clear on the arrangements for end-point assessment and, consequently, a few apprentices are unable to recall the details of how this will take place. Leaders recognised this and have taken steps to address the issue. As a result, apprentices recruited more recently have a greater understanding.

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 across the university, which they have effectively extended to their apprenticeships. They have appointed a significant number of safeguarding officers, who have undertaken relevant training. These are led by a single designated safeguarding lead, who has oversight of safeguarding across the university.

Apprentices have access to the support services available to all students, and tutors actively encourage apprentices to use that support throughout their apprenticeships. This includes support for mental health, substance abuse, nutrition and exercise, and offers focused advice for particular groups, such as mature students, those with caring responsibilities, and learners within the LGBT community.

Apprentices following nursing programmes complete significant safeguarding training as part of their course and are encouraged to apply what they learn to their own lives. They demonstrate an understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and other topics which are particularly relevant to the areas in which they live and work.

Apprentices describe feeling safe and well supported. They can identify how to access support, both from their tutors and wider university teams, at any time for help with both academic and personal issues.

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