

City University

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Peter Nelson, Her Majesty's Inspector

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London
EX1V 0HB

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 (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.

The university teaches senior leader, level solicitor, advanced clinical practice, digital and technology solutions apprenticeships at level 7. It teaches the nursing associate apprenticeship at level 5. At the time of the visit, there were around 280 apprentices on these programmes.

During the COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, managers and tutors adapted much of the curriculum, so they could teach all programmes online. At the time of the visit, staff continued to teach all programmes online. However, managers anticipate moving back to some face-to-face activities in the very near future. The impact of COVID-19 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 at the university show a strong commitment to develop and expand apprenticeships alongside their existing programmes. The university has invested significantly in the launch of the apprenticeship programme. Managers have a clear strategy for this growth and development, building on well-established relationships with employers and strong areas of vocational expertise within the university.

Leaders have developed an apprenticeship programme that fulfils the requirements of the apprenticeship standards, and fits well with the university's mission to provide 'training for business and the professions'. Managers design courses that link strongly with employers' requirements. For example, managers have worked in conjunction with local National Health Service trusts to customise the senior leadership programme, for medical consultants, and run the programme as an executive apprenticeship in medical leadership. This helps to provide the knowledge

and skills the consultants need as they progress into key leadership positions within the health trusts.

Leaders plan the apprenticeship programme to help widen participation and increase diversity at the university. In partnership with the employers, they recruit many apprentices who might otherwise not have the opportunity to study at this level. For example, the law society promotes the level 7 solicitor apprenticeship route as a valuable alternative route into the industry.

Staff at the university are well-qualified and highly experienced in their respective fields. The academic research of key staff helps underpin the rationale, for example, for the development of leadership programmes at the university.

Managers have sound quality assurance processes in place. They have correctly identified the need to create greater consistency in practice between different business units within the university. For example, they are taking action to standardise how staff collate and manage apprentices' coursework and performance data and provide feedback to apprentices on their work. They recognise how this will enable managers to access more consistent information on apprentices' performance.

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

Managers and tutors design a curriculum and teaching methods that fit well with the workplace commitments of the apprentices. Tutors have successfully adapted teaching during the COVID-19 restrictions, with virtually all teaching moving online. This has helped reduce the impact of the restrictions on the apprentices' continued development.

Tutors structure the programme well and provide a good blend of teaching, review and coaching for apprentices. The apprentices particularly value the coaching component which helps them identify and address any professional barriers and shapes their longer-term career planning.

Tutors support apprentices to develop the skills they need to be successful on their programme. For example, advanced clinical practitioner apprentices learn how to use a mix of clinical observations and medical data to present a clear rationale for different diagnoses. This helps apprentices become more confident in applying their knowledge in the workplace.

Many apprentices talk confidently about how their new-found knowledge, skills and behaviours help them gain greater recognition and acquire new responsibilities in the

workplace. For example, apprentice solicitors learn how to secure rights of audience in the magistrates' courts, a task usually only open to fully qualified solicitors.

Course leaders have been flexible around the extenuating circumstances created by the recent COVID-19 restrictions. They have worked closely with professional bodies to adapt programmes and introduce alternative assessment strategies. As a result, apprentices have been able to continue to progress on their programmes.

Tutors in different departments use different systems for storing apprentices' work, providing feedback, and monitoring progress. As a result, managers do not have a robust or timely oversight of apprentices' progress. On occasion, tutors do not explain clearly to apprentices what they need to do to achieve higher grades. Not all apprentices fully recognise or understand what components of their programme contribute to the off-the-job course component.

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

The university has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place. Apprentices feel safe. Most know what action to take should they have any concerns. Each school within the university has a welfare officer who is available to provide additional support to those apprentices who might require it.

Employers appreciate the support and guidance they receive from university staff to help assure the welfare and safety of apprentices. They speak positively about the personal and pastoral support that apprentices receive. They are particularly appreciative of staff at the university who provided significant additional support to apprentices when they experienced bereavement during the pandemic.

Key staff at the university have strong links with local networks, including the Islington 'Prevent' duty partnership board, the Metropolitan Police and the local counter terrorism group. This helps ensure that staff are well-informed about any possible risks or threats to apprentices in the area.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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