

The Press Association Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector:	Rieks Drijver, 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 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 Press Association (trading as PA Media), through its training division PA Training, has a long history of offering training to the media and public relations (PR) industries. These include in-house training for corporate clients, journalists and public relations staff who wish to upgrade their skills. It has also offered apprenticeships as a subcontractor. In 2019, PA Training gained its own apprenticeship contract. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 60 apprentices. Thirty-seven apprentices are on the level 3 junior journalist standard, 14 are on the level 4 PR and communications standard and nine are on the level 7 senior journalist standard.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have created an apprenticeship programme that builds on PA Training's expertise in the media industry. They have very successfully worked with employers to teach apprenticeships that are relevant to the industry, and to the public relations and communications needs of a range of public sector organisations and commercial companies.

Tutors and development coaches are very experienced in their professions. Senior leaders put on highly appropriate subject-based and pedagogic staff training events for staff in order to support them continually to improve their teaching practice.

Leaders and managers ensure that employers have a thorough understanding of the demands of an apprenticeship and can support apprentices to be successful. They collaborate effectively with employers to tailor the off-the-job component of the apprenticeship to each employer's needs.

Employers and staff make sure that the apprenticeship chosen is an accurate match for the job the apprentice is required to do. As a result, apprentices receive training that is highly beneficial to their role.

Employers value the apprenticeship as a way of attracting new talent into their industry. They comment positively on the way tutors teach underpinning knowledge and skills that they would not have time to cover in the workplace, such as media law, interviewing skills and creating audio and visual packages.

Leaders and managers have an open and constructive approach to evaluating the quality of training. They have made very good use of a review they commissioned which gives them a basis from which to make further improvements. They are very aware of the strengths of the programme and have effective actions in place to resolve the areas for improvement.

Governance arrangements are effective. The apprenticeship director provides governors with good information about the apprenticeship programmes so that they are well informed of the strengths and areas for improvement. Governors set purposeful actions to ensure that weaknesses are resolved.

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

Staff and employers have designed programmes that are challenging and highly relevant to apprentices' jobs. They make excellent use of both on- and off-the-job training to increase apprentices' knowledge and skills and give them a good understanding of the media and public relations environments in which they work.

At the start of the programme, staff comprehensively assess what apprentices already know and can do in relation to the knowledge, skills and behaviours of the apprenticeship standards. They review and repeat this assessment with apprentices and their employers in order to track accurately the progress they make in acquiring new knowledge.

Trainers use their professional expertise skilfully to relate topics taught to employment scenarios. They make sure that apprentices understand the background to what they learn, such as concepts of public relations, before going on to create public relations plans and press releases.

Apprentices quickly take on responsibility in new areas of work and learn to be adaptable. For example, they know how to write scripts for different types of radio shows, for different presenters and how to write in a style that matches the requirements for different target audiences.

Apprentices produce work that is commensurate with the standard expected. Their written English is of a high standard, and tutors give them detailed guidance on how to write for different purposes. Trainers give apprentices a clear evaluation of how they have met the requirements of assignments, and where they have fallen short. They give apprentices extremely constructive feedback, leaving apprentices in no doubt about how to improve.

Staff ensure that apprentices who need extra help receive it, including those who are entitled to examination concessions. Where more extensive support is required, staff create support plans on which they record in detail the extra help the apprentice needs.

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

Senior leaders have created a strong and effective culture of safeguarding. They have suitable policies and risk assessments in respect of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. The designated safeguarding lead and their deputy are suitably trained. They ensure that governors, staff and employers receive frequent training and understand their role in safeguarding apprentices.

Senior leaders have effective processes in place to ensure that permanent and contracted staff are safe to work with their apprentices. They remain up to date in understanding new or emerging threats via their links to external agencies.

Leaders have appropriate processes to deal with any safeguarding concerns. When incidents occur, staff know what to do and are effective at investigating them to bring about satisfactory outcomes. They keep detailed and accurate records of any safeguarding interventions.

Staff make sure that apprentices are fully informed about safeguarding at the start of their programme. This includes information about specific risks and mitigating actions related to the industries they work in, such as journalists making sure that they inform their editor if they are on their own investigating a story.

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