

Inspection of IBM United Kingdom Limited

Inspection dates:

7 to 9 December 2021

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

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| The quality of education | Outstanding |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Outstanding |
| Personal development | Outstanding |
| Leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Apprenticeships | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this provider

IBM is a cloud platform and cognitive solutions company. It specialises in technology and consulting, has over 350,000 employees and operates in 170 countries. IBM is registered as an employer provider and trains apprentices nationally. It does not work with any subcontractors. At the time of inspection, there were 25 apprentices on standards-based programmes. There were 21 apprentices studying the level 4 junior management consultant and four apprentices studying the level 3 information technology (IT) technical salesperson apprenticeship. At the time of starting their apprenticeship, all apprentices on these programmes were new employees of the business.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices quickly develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that they apply very effectively at work. Apprentices work successfully with high-profile clients on a wide range of projects. They make rapid progress in their jobs, and take on greater responsibility and increasingly complex tasks and projects. For example, apprentices quickly move from project team roles focused on administrative tasks to roles that involve analysing data and informing the implementation of new technologies.

Apprentices at IBM rightly feel extremely proud to be 'IBMers'. Foundation managers (FMs) who are responsible for training apprentices, and task managers who work with apprentices set very high expectations of apprentices. Task managers give apprentices high levels of responsibility in their teams and the projects on which they work. As a result, apprentices swiftly develop their confidence and make significant contributions to the business.

Apprentices enthusiastically take part in 'give back' activities. For example, apprentices provide technical skills courses to pupils at local schools. Other apprentices provide support sessions for new apprentices when they join the business. Almost all apprentices are part of one of the IBM community groups. For example, the apprentice community group takes part in analysing survey feedback, organising social events and producing the quarterly newsletter for apprentices.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a strong, clear and very ambitious vision for their apprenticeship provision. Leaders have created a highly challenging training programme. Apprentices benefit from exceptional teaching resources designed to meet the requirements of the business and swiftly prepare them to be 'client ready'. Apprentices' training helps them to work effectively in challenging environments with clients from the start of their training. They quickly develop the new knowledge, skills and behaviours to work successfully in sales and consultative roles at IBM.

Governance is highly effective. Leaders are frequently and successfully challenged to quickly identify areas to improve by those responsible for governance. For example, leaders carefully reviewed the number of apprenticeships that IBM provided and decided to focus on the two apprenticeships that they currently offer as an employer provider. Leaders use interactive tools to make sure that they identify and resolve issues quickly. Leaders have made beneficial links with similar employer providers to offer support with challenges and to share good practice.

FMs nurture and develop their apprentices, making sure that they swiftly develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to be successful apprentices and employees at IBM. Apprentices thrive in the high-performing culture, and make rapid and sustained progress in their training. Most apprentices

stay with IBM when they complete their apprenticeship and many of them move on to further study at degree level and gain promotion.

Apprentices benefit from learning plans that FMs design for each of them. Apprentices' learning plans include additional training, for example in finance for non-finance managers, and in unconscious bias to broaden and develop their knowledge of the business. All apprentices work towards IBM 'badges', which are short courses that help them develop IBM business skills, including design thinking and agile explorer. As a result of completing these courses, apprentices quickly develop skills to manage their own time efficiently and to make independent decisions.

FMs are extremely well-qualified industry experts who are carefully selected from within IBM. Apprentices benefit greatly from their current and in-depth knowledge of the business and the sectors in which they work. Apprentices quickly apply the new knowledge they learn in teaching sessions to their roles through well-planned, high-quality on- and off-the-job training. For example, apprentices can confidently explain how they consider time zones, language and culture when working with teams across the world.

FMs have expertly developed effective tracking and feedback tools. They use the tools skilfully to provide very useful feedback to apprentices. Apprentices use the feedback to improve their work, identify and fill gaps in their learning, and make rapid and sustained progress in their training. Apprentices' written work is of high quality. They continue to develop and improve their English and mathematics to help them in their current and future roles at work or in further studies, for example in working out costings on projects and explaining internal resources simply for external readers.

Leaders make sure that FMs continually improve their teaching through carefully considered training. The training they receive means that FMs have the skills to teach apprentices exceptionally well. FMs benefit from effective feedback on their teaching practice, which they use to make improvements swiftly to the quality of training for apprentices, for example by improving the interactive resources FMs use in online learning sessions.

Leaders ensure that all apprentices understand fully the end-point assessment for their apprenticeship right from the start of their training. Apprentices know in great detail what they need to do for their final assessment. They know that they can achieve merit and distinction grades, and all apprentices aspire to get a distinction. As a result, the proportion of apprentices who achieve high grades in their final assessments is very high.

Apprentices have a good understanding of the career opportunities they have during and on completion of the apprenticeship. FMs advise and guide apprentices effectively through frequent and useful 'career conversations'. Apprentices are able to make informed and well-considered choices about further study or job opportunities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding of staff and apprentices is a high priority at IBM. Leaders have made sure that the policies and procedures they have in place are effective and implemented fully. Staff and apprentices are consistently and frequently trained on safeguarding and the risks associated with radicalisation. As a result, staff and apprentices understand thoroughly how to keep themselves safe, the risks they may face, and how and to whom they would report any concerns they may have. Leaders have made sure that they have highly effective links with referral agencies, 'Prevent' duty coordinators and police representatives. Apprentices at IBM feel safe and are safe.

Provider details

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|------------------------------------|---|
| Unique reference number | 2494963 |
| Address | IBM Hursley Park Road Hursley Winchester SO21 2JN |
| Contact number | 07720 427 247 |
| Website | www.ibm.com/uk-en |
| Principal/CEO | Jenny Taylor (UK Foundation Leader) |
| Provider type | Employer provider |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the apprenticeship quality manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Emma Barrett-Peel, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Carolyn Brownsea | Her Majesty's Inspector |

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