

# Inspection of Staffordshire University

Inspection dates:

25–28 January 2022

**Overall effectiveness****Good**

The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Good**

Leadership and management

**Good**

Apprenticeships

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

**Information about this provider**

Staffordshire University has five campuses. Apprenticeships are taught from two of their campuses: one in Stoke-on-Trent and the other in Stafford. Staffordshire University started teaching apprentices – with a cohort of 150 – in 2015/2016. At the time of the inspection, they had 1,972 apprentices enrolled. All apprentices are aged 19 or over. They all study standards-based apprenticeships. Apprenticeship levels range from level 4 to level 7 with the vast majority studying the level 6 police constable degree apprenticeship. There are 142 apprentices studying levels 4 to 5 and 1,830 studying levels 6 to 7. Other areas of apprenticeship study are mainly in nursing, business, and the healthcare sector.

Staffordshire University partners – through subcontracting arrangements – with four local police forces, West Midlands, Staffordshire, West Mercia, and Warwickshire to teach the police constable degree apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices enjoy a culture of excellence in subjects such as level 6 healthcare science practitioner and the level 6 nursing degree apprenticeship. Teachers set high expectations for standards of written work and clinical practice. As a result, apprentices demonstrate high levels of professional behaviour in the workplace.

Most apprentices demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their studies and their work roles. Although police constable apprentices enjoy their programme, they do raise concerns regarding their workload.

Apprentices' attendance to face-to-face and online learning sessions is good. They appreciate the help and support provided by teachers and work-based officers. Apprentices who have additional learning needs do not always get the help they need to make rapid progress.

Most apprentices are proud of the success they achieve during their studies. Police constable apprentices talk confidently about the skills and knowledge they learn, such as carrying out investigations. However, the apprenticeship workload, and the demands of their jobs, mean they often have to complete large amounts of work in their own time. As a result, police constable apprentices often feel overburdened.

Not all apprentices understand the different career opportunities available to them outside their current employer.

Most apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Apprentices feel supported to stay mentally and physically healthy.

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

Leaders work closely with employers and other stakeholders to shape the curriculum. For example, in the psychological well-being practitioner apprenticeship, managers and teachers work effectively with mental health employers, such as National Health Service Trusts, to design a curriculum which is tackling the significant shortage in psychological well-being practitioners nationally. Within the police constable apprenticeship, the four partnership forces sit on quality assurance boards within the university structure. They meet regularly to discuss the curriculum and how best to develop it for the future needs of the police. As a result, apprenticeship curriculums meet the needs of employers closely.

Leaders plan, structure and organise most apprenticeship curriculums well. Within nursing, managers ensure that apprentices gain both theory and practical experience of a wide range of settings. In the healthcare science practitioner apprenticeship, managers order the work logically to build on scientific principles, moving on to more complex processes over time. For example, teachers develop a

curriculum which builds on knowledge about cells before covering organ systems. They then apply this knowledge in a laboratory context. As a result, apprentices build their knowledge and skills incrementally. However, due to work rotations, not all police constable apprentices are able to put their new skills quickly into practice. This delay in practice reduces the apprentices' ability to build their knowledge and skills rapidly.

Leaders have developed good and well-used progression routes within business management and nursing. Leaders have established apprenticeships at different levels to facilitate career progression and meet current and future skills gaps. For example, apprentices can move from nursing associate to registered nurse. Apprentices on management standards can move from the level 6 chartered manager apprenticeship to the level 7 senior manager apprenticeship.

Teachers and trainers have appropriate training, vocational qualifications and experience. They use their knowledge and skills well to help apprentices learn and remember more. For example, trainers on the nursing programme are well qualified and have an extensive range of experience in all aspects of nursing. Within the policing apprenticeship, police force trainers are serving police officers, who have further developed their teaching skills through formal qualifications with the university. University teaching staff are academic experts and/or ex-police force personnel. Teachers use their extensive vocational experience to place learning for apprentices into context. For example, they use real-work examples of arrests to discuss the potential challenges that apprentices may face in their job role. As a result, apprentices are able to link theory to practice well.

Teachers develop apprentices' numeracy and literacy well. For example, nurses use numeracy when engaged in medicine management. Senior leaders and managers consider the appropriate form and tone of writing for reports. Within policing, teachers develop apprentices' written English skills throughout their apprenticeship. Apprentices receive detailed and helpful feedback on written assignments and reflective logs. As a result, apprentices continue to develop their numeracy and literacy skills for their job roles.

Teachers help apprentices to develop good vocational skills. Within the psychological well-being practitioner apprenticeship, apprentices quickly develop the skills and knowledge they need to work with patients with low-level mental health issues. They apply theory and research work undertaken during their off-the-job-training into practice. For example, research work on phobias has supported them to work with patients who are experiencing anxiety issues and post-traumatic stress disorder. Within the police constable standard, apprentices practise conducting interviews and taking statements in a supportive environment before applying these skills in work situations. Trainers provide effective and clear explanations, linking to actual examples. This makes theoretical concepts real and helps apprentices to secure their understanding.

Apprentices who identify as needing additional support do not always gain the help they need to make good progress. Where the support is successful, it is often

through the request made by the apprentice. In the most successful applications, apprentices benefit from a comprehensive initial assessment, giving detailed recommendations for support. The recommended support is then implemented. For example, some apprentices receive laptop adaptations. However, apprentices with dyslexia do not always receive the support needed. As a result, some struggle to apply academic writing skills fully, which makes their development more difficult.

Apprentices achieve well. Almost all apprentices who stay on the course achieve their apprenticeship. More than half have achieved a distinction or merit. A very high proportion of apprentices on digital technological solutions and healthcare science practitioner achieved distinction grades. However, not all apprentices and their employers know what they need to do to achieve higher grades at the end of their apprenticeship assessment. This means that some apprentices are not clear on what they need to do to reach their potential.

Teachers proactively promote equality of opportunity. In nursing, apprentices give examples such as, what should happen when patients say 'no' and refuse treatment, or when chaperones may be needed to escort patients. In sessions, teachers include how to consider different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs when deciding treatments. Apprentices demonstrate an understanding of citizenship and participate in activities to support their wider communities. As a result, they develop their character and confidence well.

Teachers do not consistently promote career opportunities for apprentices. Apprentices have access to a central careers service, a careers website, and an employment agency. However, it is not clear how often they use this service. Some schools of the university offer well-formulated careers education that provides a clear understanding of the wider career opportunities available to apprentices. However, in other schools this is less well developed, and some apprentices do not use the services available to them. As a result, a few apprentices do not gain an understanding of the career opportunities available to them outside their current employer.

Leaders and managers have a highly effective subcontracting partnership, which is effective in teaching the police constable apprenticeship. University staff work well with key members of the police through their governance and oversight structures to ensure that subcontractors are teaching to the standards' requirements. Leaders have put in place thorough systems to monitor subcontractors. For example, due to the size of the provision, managers use external organisations to audit funding compliance.

Governors have a clear and insightful overview of apprenticeships within the university. Initially, governors assessed the risks associated with the inclusion of teaching apprenticeships to the university portfolio as high. This resulted in a limited curriculum offer. Since the last inspection, governors have focused their time to good effect on increasing the quality of apprenticeships. They used governance subgroups, such as committees for quality and standards, strategy and performance, and audit and risk, to hold managers to account on the differing quality aspects

within apprenticeships. As a result, governors rightly feel assured that the quality of the provision has improved.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Designated safeguarding leads are appropriately qualified and experienced. They recognise well the local concerns with topics, such as county lines, domestic abuse, and identify clearly other issues associated with the local demographics. They have taken seriously concerns around sexual harassment. This has resulted in the appointment of 'sexual violence relationship officers' to support victims and perpetrators. They have developed strong relationships with partners, such as the local authority and the local police force.

Leaders track and monitor mandatory training well. Staff must undertake training in aspects such as safeguarding, equality, diversity and inclusion, health and safety and the 'Prevent' duty. Onboarding processes are appropriate. They have in place suitable systems for referring, tracking, and monitoring of safeguarding concerns.

Apprentices feel safe and can articulate well what to do if they did not feel safe. Apprentices can contextualise 'safety' to their chosen careers. For example, nurses who worked on COVID-19 wards explained how they had to take extra protection to keep themselves and others safe. They understand how to raise concerns both at the university and when in the workplace.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders should ensure that police constable apprentices get the opportunity to practise their new skills at appropriate times to ensure they can retain the knowledge and skills learned more readily.
- Leaders must ensure that police constable apprentices have sufficient time to complete their studies. They need to make sure to reduce the burden of completing assignments and reflective logs in the apprentices' own time.
- Leaders must make sure apprentices who identify with a support need get the help they require to make swift progress.
- Leaders need to make sure that apprentices recognise and understand the career opportunities available to them outside of their current employer.
- Leaders should make sure that apprentices and employers have a thorough understanding of the requirements and grades associated with the end-point assessment.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133882
<b>Address</b>	Staffordshire University Stoke-on-Trent Campus College Road Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE
<b>Contact number</b>	01782294000
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.staffs.ac.uk">www.staffs.ac.uk</a>
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Professor Martin Jones
<b>Provider type</b>	Higher Education Provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14–17 May 2019
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	The Chief Constable of West Midlands The Chief Constable of Staffordshire The Chief Constable of West Mercia The Chief Constable of Warwickshire

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the associate dean, lead for apprentices, 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

Bev Ramsell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Ward	Her Majesty's Inspector
Allan Shaw	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Collett	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mark Parton	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Sharon Dowling	Her Majesty's Inspector
Andrea Dill-Russell	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Deane	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

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