

The Vocational Academy Essex Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	2654183
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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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 Vocational Training Academy Essex Ltd is an independent training provider with a head office and training centre in Southend-on-Sea, and training centres in Blackpool and Chorley. Most apprentices are based in workplaces within travelling distance of the relevant training centre. There are a variety of ways in which apprentices can study according to their needs and preferences, and those of their employer, such as on-site delivery, remote learning and attending classes.

At the time of the visit, there were 81 apprentices in learning. Most are on level 2 and level 3 standards-based apprenticeships. There are no apprentices in receipt of high-needs funding and the provider has no subcontractors.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders have a clear intent for their apprenticeships. They offer apprenticeships that build on the experience and expertise of leaders and staff, and that address local skills shortages.

Leaders are ambitious for their apprentices. They recruit specialist tutors who are well qualified and experienced. Tutors provide high-quality training and encourage apprentices to develop skills beyond the level required by their apprenticeship.

Apprentices are recruited appropriately to apprenticeships. From their starting points, they gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that are relevant to their job roles. Leaders adapt delivery to meet the needs of employers and apprentices. For example, where required by employers, the apprenticeship is delivered on site and remotely, rather than requiring attendance at classes.

Apprentices are fully informed about the structure and assessment of the programme at an early stage. While leaders have ensured that most apprentices whom they have recruited are committed to their apprenticeship, a small minority have lacked motivation and have left without completing it.

Most employers provide good support for apprentices in the workplace and allocate the appropriate amount of time for off-the-job training. Tutors involve apprentices' workplace supervisors fully in the regular reviews of apprentices' progress and in planning apprentices' training. However, leaders have not ensured that a very small minority of employers were fully committed prior to placing apprentices with them. Leaders have stopped working with these employers, resulting in a small minority of construction apprentices making slow progress while leaders help them to find alternative employment.

Governance arrangements are underdeveloped. Leaders have very recently appointed two governors with highly relevant experience and expertise to an advisory board. However, it is too early to identify the impact of this.

Leaders have a realistic understanding of the strengths and areas to improve in their provision. They have used feedback effectively from a variety of sources, such as lesson observations and independent quality assurance reports, to write and implement a comprehensive quality improvement plan, which they monitor and evaluate.

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

Leaders ensure that the prior learning of apprentices is thoroughly assessed. Tutors use these results to accurately identify the starting points of apprentices and to plan appropriate support to meet their needs.

Apprentices develop a broad range of useful and relevant new skills, knowledge and behaviours. They enjoy their programmes and note the relevance to their job roles and their businesses. For example, a sports coaching apprentice is now able to provide mental and physical performance coaching to enable a team to reach their goals. Employers recognise the positive impact of apprentices on their business, such as apprentices being able to work independently with customers in an efficient manner.

Tutors present information clearly and in a logical order so that apprentices build on previous learning and improve their skills. Tutors provide prompt and useful feedback on apprentices' work and performance. Apprentices develop good interpersonal skills. Employers note that the training enthuses their apprentices, resulting in exemplary attendance, positive attitudes and excellent behaviours. For example, a business administration apprentice developed more confidence in dealing with customers.

Leaders do not ensure that a minority of apprentices make sufficient progress in completing functional skills qualifications. A few tutors do not always focus sufficiently on improving and consolidating apprentices' existing skills in English or mathematics. Functional skills mathematics workshops are not sufficiently detailed or extensive to enable all apprentices attending to improve their skills.

Apprentices receive careers advice and guidance at enrolment, but not systematically through the programme. Consequently, they are not always aware of the wider progression opportunities open to them beyond those offered by their current employer.

Apprentices understand what is expected in their final assessment. They talk confidently about the requirements and have practised the skills required. However, not all apprentices are aware of the opportunity to gain higher grades, such as a distinction.

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

Leaders have developed a culture of safeguarding. At the start of their apprenticeship, apprentices complete online training in safeguarding, online safety, and the 'Prevent' duty. Tutors refresh their understanding effectively during reviews. As a result, apprentices have the information they need to stay safe. For example, apprentices understand the general threats posed by extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. However, apprentices are insufficiently aware of local risks and how these might affect them in their daily lives.

Apprentices are, and feel, safe in the workplace and follow safe working practices. Employers place a high priority on maintaining health and safety standards to minimise accidents in the high-risk environments in which some apprentices work. As a result, apprentices use appropriate personal protective equipment and work in a safe manner.

Apprentices know how to report concerns. When they do so, leaders and tutors take effective steps and provide appropriate help and support.

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