

Inspection of University of Bradford

Inspection dates: 22 to 25 March 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

University of Bradford started to deliver apprenticeships in 2017. It had a progress monitoring visit in May 2019, when it was found to be making reasonable progress against all three themes.

The university currently has three faculties that deliver higher-level and degree apprenticeships; these are health studies, life sciences, and management, law and social sciences. At the time of the inspection, there were 297 apprentices on standards-based programmes from level 5 to level 7. The standards with the largest number of apprentices were level 6 chartered manager and level 7 senior leader programmes, with 173 apprentices between them. The other apprentices were on level 5 nurse associate, level 6 laboratory scientist, level 6 healthcare science practitioner and level 7 advanced clinical practitioner programmes.

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

Employers ensure that apprentices' off-the-job time is protected for study and development. As a result, apprentices' attendance at day-release and week-long blocks of study at the university is high.

Many apprentices grow in their personal confidence and resilience at work while they are on their apprenticeship programme. For example, apprentices who are too nervous to make announcements over a public address system at work when they start on programmes manage whole teams of staff by the time they have finished.

Apprentices feel safe and know whom to contact if they have concerns about bullying or workplace stress. They feel confident that their personal tutors would take action and that there would be support available in such instances.

Apprentices receive helpful and impartial careers advice throughout their time at the university, and after they have left. Alumni can use the university's careers advice service for five years after they have completed their apprenticeships.

Apprentices have the same access to the wide range of support services as full-time higher education students. For example, they have benefited from the university's accredited counselling service when they have struggled with their mental health.

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

Leaders and managers do not ensure that the quality of education is delivered to a consistently high standard across all faculties within the university. Following the progress monitoring visit, they recognised the need to strengthen the arrangements for providing governance and oversight of the quality of higher-degree apprenticeships, and established two new committees to carry out these functions. Although these new arrangements show early signs of bringing about improvements, it is still too early to see a consistently positive impact across all areas of the apprenticeship provision.

Not all leaders in faculties have sufficient awareness of the quality of the apprenticeship programmes or respond quickly enough to the feedback that apprentices give on their experiences of these programmes. For example, in health studies, they do not know that some apprentices struggle with their academic writing skills or that apprentices are taught clinical skills, such as taking blood pressure, well after they have already carried them out frequently at work.

Leaders and managers have been too slow to resolve some of the issues that have arisen through the lack of previous central management control over the apprenticeship programmes. They are only now providing support to those apprentices who were enrolled on programmes without adequate proof of prior English and mathematics qualifications at level 2. As a result, these apprentices have made slower progress towards the gateway stage of the standard, particularly on

the senior leaders and healthcare science standards, where between a fifth and a quarter of apprentices still need to achieve qualifications in English and mathematics.

Leaders and managers have not yet managed to get every faculty to integrate the apprenticeship standards seamlessly into their higher degree qualifications. As a result, on certain standards, such as the senior leader level 7, some apprentices and employers regard the apprenticeship as a 'bolt-on' to their MBA programme.

Not all management teams within faculties engage in an effective and timely way with the quality improvement action planning process. As a result, the pace of quality improvement is too slow.

Although the apprenticeship programmes make up a very small proportion of the university's overall curriculum offer, senior leaders, from the vice-chancellor down, are ambitious to expand apprenticeships into areas where the university has real strengths, such as engineering and manufacturing, public sector management and social work. Managers are working diligently to ensure that this expansion will be based securely on the principles and practices for degree apprenticeship programmes.

Senior leaders view apprenticeships as part of the university's contribution to its role of developing high-level skills in the city of Bradford and the wider West Yorkshire area. Apprenticeships contribute to the university's mission to increase social mobility among the disadvantaged and diverse communities that it serves.

The engagement of employers in tripartite reviews is not sufficiently consistent across the different standards. On the chartered management programme, which is exclusively for aspiring managers in a large national retail company, line managers follow corporate guidance on involvement in reviews. At other employers, engagement is less frequent. As a result, these employers are often not clear about the progress that their apprentices are making and do not create opportunities for apprentices to apply their knowledge at work.

On the first year of the level 5 nursing associate standard, lecturers do not provide sufficient time and support to enable apprentices to understand biological concepts, even though the apprentices have stated that they find this subject difficult. Lecturers have not given apprentices clear guidance on how to receive additional academic support with this subject, even though these apprentices have been on programme for three months.

The quality of feedback to apprentices varies too much between different lecturers and between programmes. Too many apprentices report that they do not receive critical and helpful feedback that enables them to reflect on their work and improve it. In the instances where feedback is good, apprentices produce written work that is more evaluative and analytical in its approach.

Curriculum managers and lecturers have developed a curriculum and plan learning in a logical order to build apprentices' knowledge and skills progressively. Lecturers frequently adapt the curriculum to ensure apprentices have a firm understanding of core concepts

before moving on to more complex operations. For example, on the healthcare science practitioner programme, apprentices develop knowledge of biochemistry, microbiology and human physiology before moving on to more specialist topics in medical and analytical biochemistry. As a result, most apprentices develop sound knowledge, skills and behaviours and routinely apply these in their workplaces.

Most lecturers use an effective range of teaching techniques to help apprentices learn, practise and discuss new knowledge and skills. In addition to formal lectures, lecturers also devise workshops where apprentices collaborate to complete case studies. At the end of most sessions, apprentices take short quizzes to enable them to recap quickly what they have just learned in the lesson. As a result, most apprentices can recall the information that they were taught earlier in their programmes and can apply it in the workplace.

Most lecturers support those apprentices who are exempt from taking level 2 examinations in English and mathematics to develop their skills in these subjects. For example, healthcare science apprentices learn how to calculate the right level of dilutions for solutions so that monitoring equipment can provide accurate readings.

Lecturers are highly qualified academics with relevant industry experience. They are passionate about the subjects that they teach. Curriculum managers ensure that subject experts deliver each module, and often invite guest lecturers to lead lessons.

Employers value the new skills, knowledge and behaviours that apprentices develop while they are on the higher-degree apprenticeship programmes. Senior leadership apprentices are able to support their colleagues at work in carrying out financial operations such as how to calculate company earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation are deducted.

Those apprentices who have completed their programmes progress well at work. Apprentices on the chartered manager programme are promoted to higher-level management roles, where they become responsible for managing whole teams.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The designated safeguarding lead and deputy leads are trained to the right level and have the relevant experience to fulfil their roles. They have effective relationships with the police, the regional 'Prevent' coordinator and the adult social care sector, as well as with voluntary agencies specialising in providing support in areas such as homelessness and domestic abuse.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are proportionate to keep adult apprentices safe, recognising apprentices' right to manage risks while protecting the most vulnerable.

Managers follow safe recruitment practices. They ensure that right to residence and the qualifications of lecturers are all verified securely on appointment. Staff undertake relevant refresher training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Leaders and managers have been proactive in raising apprentices' awareness of sexual abuse and harassment. They have developed a new module for apprentices as part of the work they do on broader issues of diversity and inclusion. There are extensive awareness-raising campaigns across the university's media platforms.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all existing and new higher-degree programmes are comprehensively mapped across to the relevant apprenticeship standard, so that apprentices can develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the standards throughout the programme.
- Ensure that all senior leaders and curriculum managers in faculties provide rigorous oversight of the quality of the delivery of the higher-degree apprenticeship programmes for which they are responsible, so they can identify those aspects of the programmes that need to improve.
- Inform employers at the outset of programmes about their responsibility to participate in tripartite reviews, and follow up more effectively those employers who do not engage in reviews, to increase their level of participation.
- Ensure that information on apprentices' prior qualifications, particularly their English and mathematics qualifications, is accurately recorded when they are enrolled on to programmes.
- Inform apprentices, particularly those on the nurse associate standard, about where they can receive additional support to help them improve the subject knowledge and academic writing skills that they find difficult.
- Support lecturers to improve the quality of written feedback they give to apprentices, so that apprentices can understand what it is they need to improve and how they can achieve higher marks.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133791
Address	Richmond Road Bradford BD7 1DP
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Website	https://brad.ac.uk
Principal/CEO	Professor Shirley Congdon
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the pro-vice chancellor for learning, teaching and student experience, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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

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