

Skills Office Network Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Jacquie Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector

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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.

Skills Office Network Limited is an independent learning provider which has its head office in Gateshead. It provides training to apprentices across the country. The provider first received funding to deliver apprenticeships in 2020. It currently has 14 apprentices enrolled on standards-based programmes in management and international freight forwarding. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 12 apprentices enrolled on a level 3 international freight forwarding (IFF) programme and two on a level 5 operations manager programme.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Leaders have a clear vision, which they implement successfully. They provide high-quality training to apprentices in management and international freight forwarding. They have responded effectively to the new training requirements in the freight industry following Brexit, to a shortage of specialist staff in the industry, and to a lack of quality management training.

Leaders work closely with employers to develop the curriculum to meet business needs. For example, they have responded to employer requests to include workshops on Brexit on the level 3 IFF programme, even though this is not a requirement of the standard.

Leaders recruit tutors with significant industry experience and who are well qualified. They ensure that tutors attend effective training which is well planned in response to individual needs. For example, tutors who need to improve their skills in using assessment activities to check the understanding of apprentices shadow more experienced tutors.

Leaders support tutors to develop high-quality learning resources that are made available through the provider's online learning platform. These resources help apprentices to build their knowledge over time. The activities that apprentices undertake are clearly aligned to the apprenticeship standards so that apprentices can apply their knowledge and skills successfully in the workplace. Tutors have developed useful resources on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty, British values, and equality and diversity that help to support apprentices' understanding of the topics.

Leaders have an effective oversight of the quality of the provision. They use external staff well to enhance this process and to provide effective scrutiny and challenge. Leaders and managers complete a range of activities, such as observations of training, to review and improve the quality of the programmes that they provide.

Leaders review the progress of apprentices frequently and identify accurately apprentices who are at risk of falling behind. They ensure that these apprentices attend additional training sessions to enable them to catch up quickly.

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

Managers work closely with tutors and industry experts to plan a curriculum that is closely aligned to the apprenticeship standards and enables apprentices to build on their skills and knowledge over time. Apprentices on the level 3 IFF programme develop a broad understanding of the industry before moving into specialist topics such as the range of freight routes available, including air, sea and road.

Tutors work effectively with employers to ensure that apprentices are suitable for an apprenticeship and can develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They plan on- and off-the-job training very well with line managers to enable apprentices to develop and practise their skills further in the workplace. Consequently, apprentices successfully acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, apprentices on the level 5 operations manager programme develop a clear understanding of management theory and apply this to their job roles, including when carrying out problem-solving activities and when making work processes more efficient.

Apprentices make good progress in developing further their English and mathematics skills through helpful support from tutors. For example, they learn to apply percentage increases to customer invoices and to identify the added costs of not using correct freight procedures. Tutors support apprentices to improve their writing skills by identifying spelling and punctuation errors in their work and advising them how to improve. Apprentices who need to gain qualifications in English and mathematics as part of their apprenticeship receive helpful individual support from specialist tutors and make at least expected progress towards passing their examinations.

Tutors teach the curriculum well in order to enable apprentices to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours. Apprentices attend monthly online workshops and complete tasks and assignments linked to their job roles in order to assess their progress. Tutors provide informative presentations and activities for apprentices, including group discussions.

Apprentices and their employers have a thorough understanding of the requirements for end-point assessment, and apprentices receive useful support from tutors in preparing for it. They receive helpful ongoing careers advice regarding the next steps in their careers. This includes developing management skills and specialised skills with their employer and through stand-alone management courses.

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

The designated safeguarding lead and her deputy have appropriate training and experience to be effective in their roles. Leaders implement appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures which identify clearly how to report a concern. They have in place suitable safe recruitment practices to ensure that staff are appropriate to work with apprentices.

Tutors provide effective training for apprentices on safeguarding and the risks of extremism and radicalisation. As a result, apprentices have a good understanding of the potential risks that they face at work and in the community.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns they may have. Tutors support them with their well-being, including how to prioritise at work in order to keep a healthy work-life balance. Apprentices have a good understanding of the risks local to them and have a useful knowledge of issues such as incels and county lines.

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