

Inspection of Kreston Reeves LLP

Inspection dates:

10 to 12 May 2022

Overall effectiveness**Good**

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Apprenticeships

Good

Provision for learners with high needs

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Kreston Reeves LLP has offices throughout the South-East of England and provides accountancy and business services across the region. They are an employer provider and have commissioned external providers to teach the technical qualification elements of the apprenticeship.

At the time of the inspection, there were 104 apprentices on the level 7 accountancy or taxation professional apprenticeship; six of whom are following the tax pathway. All apprentices are employed by Kreston Reeves and located in offices across London and the South-East.

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

Apprentices enjoy their learning. They value the specialist technical training sessions at college highly and rightly feel well supported by managers in the workplace. They quickly develop independence and confidence and learn to take responsibility for their own client-facing work at an early stage.

Accounting apprentices rapidly develop the knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need to succeed in the sector. They move swiftly and successfully from preparing opening balance adjustments to preparing a full set of accounts independently. However, the small number of apprentices following the tax pathway make substantially slower progress. Tax apprentices do not have the clear targets and milestones to help them navigate through the programme and achieve in a timely fashion.

Apprentices benefit from a strong, inclusive culture in the workplace that treats them as professionals and fosters open communication across all levels of the organisation. Second year apprentices act as mentors for new apprentices to help them to settle in. Apprentices are well represented among office representatives on the staff forums. They feel comfortable raising any issues directly with senior managers. They are confident that managers listen to, and act on their concerns.

Apprentices enjoy a wide range of activities outside of their core programme which help them to become responsible citizens, active in the local community. They participate in sports events as part of the employer's comprehensive active lifestyle programme. They helped to build a children's respite home and organised fund-raising activities for local charities as part of the corporate social responsibility strategy.

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

Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to training and support. They have successfully created culture of 'home-grown talent', where many managers and senior leaders have themselves once been apprentices or trainees. They are ambitious for their apprentices. Accountancy apprentices with identified relevant prior experience move up the promotional pathway rapidly and take on complex work with clients early in their studies.

Leaders have considered their rationale for introducing apprenticeships carefully and have made them an integral part of their workforce planning strategy. This is already demonstrating a positive impact on recruitment, increasing numbers on the school-leaver pathway.

Accounting apprentices benefit from a high-quality, well planned training programme which enables them to build their knowledge and skills in a logical way and apply it effectively in the workplace. They learn initially about core accounting principles

before moving on to more-complex financial reporting concepts, such as group accounting and preparation of cashflows. Apprentices are able to apply concepts such as depreciation in their audit work, and confidently carry out relevant field work independently.

Leaders and managers recognise the importance of ensuring that apprentices learn the digital skills they need to be successful in the finance industry. Leaders have designed an effective programme that enables apprentices to quickly gain the necessary digital competences to succeed in this fast moving, technologically driven environment. For example, apprentices learn and use advanced spreadsheet skills to improve their efficiency in their work on accounts.

Trainers who teach at the specialist accountancy colleges are highly qualified finance professionals with substantial financial and teaching experience. They use their subject knowledge well to check apprentices' understanding and to inform lesson planning. Accountancy apprentices enjoy their technical training sessions at college. They value their relationships with the trainers highly, and appreciate the helpful focused revision classes and extensive support that trainers give them when preparing for professional exams.

Apprentices' attendance at technical training sessions is good. Most apprentices attend sessions face to face. Those who are unable to travel into the training college due to illness, join via live streaming of classroom sessions, where they participate well.

Trainers incorporate relevant and well-contextualised learning about aspects of British values alongside teaching the knowledge, skills, and behaviours of the standard. As a result, apprentices become responsible and ethical finance professionals. Apprentices understand the consequences of audit failure and learn how to apply tax legislation and General Data Protection Regulation appropriately in their workplace.

Managers use their industry expertise well to mentor and support their accountancy apprentices effectively. They use their professional knowledge to provide constructive feedback so that apprentices know how to improve their communication skills and practical work.

Apprentices have helpful discussions about individual career plans with their managers. They benefit from changes to their roles and secondments to other teams to follow their interests and deepen their understanding of specific fields of accounting, such as audit work or working with charities. Apprentices value the professional qualifications included in the apprenticeship. They understand the importance of gaining chartered accountant status to facilitate their long-term careers within finance.

Managers do not support apprentices who are making slow progress on the tax pathway well enough. They do not intervene quickly enough to help apprentices who are struggling or for whom the apprenticeship curriculum no longer meets their

needs. Apprentices who have fallen behind, do not understand the progress they are making or how to get back on track. As a result, too many of the small number of tax apprentices are substantially behind their expected completion date.

Leaders do not ensure that managers help apprentices understand enough about the differing risks in each locality. As a result, apprentices have only limited understanding of local threats and how to keep themselves and others safe from threats of radicalisation.

The executive committee provides an appropriate level of governance and oversight for the training arm of the organisation. Committee members have a clear understanding of the strengths of their provision. However, they do not fully understand about the slow progress of apprentices on the tax pathway and are not aware of the limited progress leaders have made in areas such as raising awareness of radicalisation and extremism which were previously highlighted as areas for development. As a result, they do not ensure that areas prioritised in the quality improvement plan are those which will have the greatest impact for learners.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appropriate processes in place for the identification and recording of well-being and safeguarding concerns. Managers put in place helpful support plans for apprentices who show a sudden change in behaviour or character. They make referrals to external agencies, such as occupational health, where appropriate.

Leaders undertake appropriate checks on new staff to ensure they are safe to work with apprentices. Apprentices feel safe and know how to raise concerns. Workplace harassment and grievance procedures provide a clear route for apprentices to identify and raise concerns, should they arise.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that tax apprentices receive the appropriate help and support to enable them to catch up and complete their apprenticeships quickly.
- Leaders should strengthen governance arrangements to ensure that managers improve weaknesses in quality of education quickly.
- Leaders must ensure that apprentices better understand local risks, including radicalisation and extremism, and know the actions to take if they are at risk.

Provider details

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Principal/CEO	Nigel Fright
Provider type	Employer Provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	First Intuition Limited First Intuition Maidstone Limited Scintillo Limited RELX (UK) Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Learning and Development, 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.

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