

Inspection of University of Suffolk

Inspection dates:

24 to 27 May 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

University of Suffolk is a new university, having gained taught degree awarding powers and university title in 2016. It previously operated as University Campus Suffolk, in partnership with the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. It has been offering apprenticeships since 2017.

At the time of inspection, there were 368 apprentices on standards-based apprenticeship programmes from level 5 to level 7. The largest proportion are in health, and information technology (IT). The university had 129 nursing associate apprentices and 53 apprentices on the registered nurse degree apprenticeship. Both programmes are approved by the Nursing and Midwifery Council. Level 6 digital technology solutions professional had 108 apprentices, almost all of whom work for a national IT infrastructure company. The remaining apprentices were on the level 6 social worker, level 5 healthcare assistant practitioner and level 7 senior leader apprenticeships. No apprentices are in receipt of high needs funding. University of Suffolk does not work with any subcontractor partners.

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

Apprentices, many of whom are returning to learning as mature students, enjoy their studies. They rightly value their relationships with staff, who support them academically and in the workplace. Apprentices greatly appreciate their lecturers' skill at making academic work relevant and accessible.

Apprentices make good use of opportunities to focus assessments on live projects that add value to their workplace. For example, senior leader apprentices create marketing plans and digital technology apprentices build IT systems for their employers.

Apprentices benefit from well-resourced, high-quality training facilities. They rightly value the well-stocked libraries, learning resources centres and the helpful staff who work in them.

Apprentices feel that university study has helped them to be more confident at work. Nursing associate apprentices quickly gain confidence to provide clinical information and opinions during reviews at ward meetings. Senior leader apprentices use their skills to structure documents more effectively. Social work apprentices develop resilience skills that enable them to cope better with the demands of the profession.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns at work and at the university. They understand their responsibility for health and safety in the workplace and are acutely aware of their responsibilities to their patients, service users and clients.

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

Leaders work closely and purposefully with employers to design an apprenticeship offer that meets local and regional skills needs very well. Nursing and social work apprenticeships support NHS trusts and local authorities to meet critical skills gaps in the workforce.

Apprentices' training is carefully sequenced so that learning builds on what they know and can do. Registered nurse apprentices learn about anatomy and physiology first. They then consider how these influence different conditions and impact on patient care. Digital technology apprentices learn computer systems and basics of programming. They then specialise as either network or software engineers. Social work apprentices reflect on their own life experiences. This helps them explore and challenge personal bias in the law and social policy module.

Leaders support apprentices with additional needs very well. Apprentices use specialist software and have extended deadlines or more time in exams, which makes learning accessible. Apprentices with dyslexia value highly the extra support they receive from tutors. This has enabled them to achieve their qualification and become more successful in the workplace. Lecturers provide teaching about

academic writing and referencing early. This builds the confidence of apprentices who have been out of education.

Apprentices are punctual and committed to their learning and work. Attendance at training is very high and non-attendance is rare. However, for the very few apprentices who need to attend functional skills mathematics, attendance is too low.

Lecturers use their extensive experience and industry knowledge highly effectively to promote thought-provoking discussions. They ensure that apprentices understand the application of what they are learning. Nursing associate apprentices sensitively discussed the transition points between end of life and palliative care, and how these contribute to the decision-making process.

In most cases, practice educators and employers work together effectively to identify apprentices' starting points and carry out quarterly progress reviews. They are well attended by employers and enable apprentices to gain a valuable understanding of their progress academically and in practice.

Staff provide excellent support for apprentices' well-being. Apprentices access helpful, high-quality resources and support from a dedicated online platform when they have issues or concerns about mindfulness, poor sleep, stress or physical well-being. Apprentices who experienced the loss of colleagues during the pandemic greatly appreciated the proactive support and grief counselling provided.

Apprentices have a good understanding of British values. They respect the rights of others and respect the differences within a multicultural society while following the rule of law.

Leaders have not acted swiftly enough to remedy the weaknesses in the assistant practitioner apprenticeship. While it is recognised that the programme is being discontinued, too many of the current apprentices have exceeded their planned end dates. For a small minority of apprentices, a few taught units do not fit their workplace needs well. For example, modules on dispensing medicines are not relevant for apprentices working in therapeutic care in the community. Staff have not prepared apprentices well enough for their end-point assessment. Too many assistant practitioners are unclear about the requirements of their final assessment and about what they need to do to complete the apprenticeship.

Staff provide apprentices with helpful careers advice and guidance that enables them to consider progression within their own roles and to think more widely about transferrable skills they have developed. Most apprentices remain with their employer when they complete their apprenticeship. Many progress to further qualifications, such as moving on to the registered nurse programme, or take on roles with greater responsibility. Apprentices in the first social work cohort secured full-time employment on successful completion of their studies.

Governance and oversight of apprenticeships are good. Leaders and managers have revised and significantly strengthened oversight of apprenticeships through the

introduction of a clear structure of apprenticeship-specific operational and strategic level committees that report directly to the senior leadership team and governing body.

Leaders have a strong and effective focus on driving forward quality improvement for apprenticeships. They place a high value on apprenticeships as part of the strategic plans for the university. Staff at all levels of the organisation, including governors, understand apprenticeships fully and recognise the transformational journey that the university is on to grow high-quality apprenticeships.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers have embedded a strong and effective culture of safeguarding throughout the university. They have run age-appropriate campaigns around key themes, including sexual harassment, domestic abuse, suicide prevention and the white ribbon campaign to end violence against women. The appropriately trained safeguarding team is well informed about local and regional risks and ensures apprentices know how to keep themselves safe from those risks. Apprentices have a sufficiently broad understanding of potential safeguarding issues in relation to their daily lives. However, a small number of social work apprentices have only a superficial understanding of radicalisation and extremism for themselves, their client group and their locality.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders must ensure that social work apprentices better understand local risks around radicalisation and extremism and know the actions to take if they are at risk.
- Leaders must take effective action to support those apprentices still on the healthcare assistant practitioner. They must ensure that learning content is relevant to apprentices' work role and ensure that all apprentices fully understand the expectations and requirements of the end-point assessment.
- Leaders should improve attendance for the very small number of apprentices studying functional skills mathematics.

Provider details

Unique reference number	146206
Address	Waterfront Building Neptune Quay Ipswich IP4 1QJ
Contact number	01473338000
Website	https://www.uos.ac.uk
Principal/Vice-Chancellor/CEO	Professor Helen Langton
Provider type	Higher education institution
Dates of previous inspection	3 to 5 March 2020
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the academic registrar, 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

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