

Inspection of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

Inspection dates: 7 to 10 June 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

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

Information about this provider

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) became an employer apprenticeship provider in 2017. At the time of the inspection, there were 168 apprentices across three standards-based programmes. Two apprenticeship programmes are part of the provider's tax academy and account for 84 apprentices, of whom 38 are on the level 3 investigating officer programme and 46 on the level 4 accounting/taxation technicians programme. The remaining 84 apprentices are on the level 4 counter fraud professionals apprenticeship which commenced delivery in January 2022 as a part of the counter fraud department. The provider works with one subcontractor, Capita, which delivers courses leading to functional skills qualifications.

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

Since the previous monitoring visit in September 2019, too many employees who were recruited on to apprenticeships have not completed their programmes. This is because leaders initially made it mandatory for all employees to enrol on an apprenticeship. They then reversed this decision in January 2021 and gave employees the opportunity to withdraw from their programmes.

Apprentices who remain on their programme gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to carry out their roles successfully. They value the training and support provided by experienced and expert staff, including trainers, assessors and line managers, that enables them to progress quickly to working on more complex and difficult cases.

Apprentices have positive attitudes to their work and learning. Apprentices on the level 4 counter fraud investigator apprenticeship benefit from the investment made by their employer in their training and the support that they receive from their trainers and managers. Recent changes to the tax academy programme have included a new assessor/coach model which has enabled apprentices who had previously been disengaged from training due to numerous changes and disruption to their programme to re-engage and become more confident.

Apprentices benefit from a positive and respectful culture in which to learn. Managers and trainers take the time to get to know their apprentices and understand their support needs. Trainers on level 3 investigating officer apprenticeships are proud of how apprentices develop in their professional roles as investigators. Managers value the contribution that apprentices bring to their teams in terms of fresh ideas and approaches.

Trainers provide apprentices with helpful information about fundamental British values and specify the importance of these as apprentices develop into their roles at HMRC. Assessors discuss and reinforce information during one-to-one meetings by emphasising why British values are an important aspect of apprentices' jobs. Apprentices clearly articulate how they apply British values in their work, such as the rule of law and the importance of showing respect and tolerance towards customers and colleagues.

Apprentices feel safe and have a clear understanding of safeguarding. They understand the range of challenges that some people face, such as forced and predatory marriage and other forms of exploitation, and they understand how they can protect themselves and others from radicalisation and extremism. Apprentices feel confident that any reported concerns would be taken seriously, that they would be supported, and that appropriate actions would be taken. Apprentices consider the culture of HMRC to be one where bullying is not tolerated.

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

In response to the requirement to increase recruitment and training significantly, senior leaders took the decision in 2019 to place around 2,500 new and existing employees on

investigator officer and professional accountancy tax technician apprenticeship programmes in the tax academy. They subsequently realised that this approach was not appropriate as they did not have the structure or capacity to support this number of apprentices. Furthermore, these programmes did not meet the requirements of the apprenticeship standards. This led to confusion and uncertainty for many apprentices, which was exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their job roles. Senior leaders subsequently took the decision to change their position on mandating employees to enrol on an apprenticeship and offered existing apprentices the option to withdraw from their programme. As a result, the vast majority of tax academy apprentices withdrew from their apprenticeship before completing it. Those who remained on the programmes did not receive sufficient support and guidance in the early stages of their apprenticeship. As a result, they have not progressed quickly enough and have had their end dates extended by a significant length of time.

Following changes in the management of the tax academy programmes, leaders and managers have, over recent months, successfully put in place strategies to provide more effective support for apprentices on these programmes in order to enable them to achieve their apprenticeship. They are fully committed to supporting all remaining apprentices to achieve their apprenticeship qualifications. However, a few apprentices continue to leave their programme without achieving qualifications.

Leaders and managers now have a clear strategy for the apprenticeship programmes that they provide. The three programmes that they run are designed to address staff shortages in niche government roles, particularly tax collection and counter fraud. Recruitment to these roles increased when government leaders identified high-value tax losses through fraud.

Leaders have recently introduced a counter fraud professional apprenticeship in response to identified need. Managers plan the curriculum for this programme coherently and effectively. In their off-the-job training, counter fraud apprentices learn each element of the fundamental theoretical knowledge needed for their roles and apply their new learning in practical settings before moving on to more complex topics. Trainers use assessment and feedback appropriately to improve apprentices' practice. Apprentices successfully demonstrate and consolidate their learning in practical settings such as courtrooms. This helps them to rapidly and securely develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours which are relevant to their roles.

Leaders and managers have recruited staff who are highly experienced and qualified in the areas in which they teach. Their experience enables them to talk to apprentices about the challenges and interesting aspects of their roles as tax or fraud investigators. However, the vast majority of trainers do not hold teaching qualifications and, in a few instances, trainers on the tax academy apprenticeship do not demonstrate sufficiently high-level skills in teaching.

Attendance levels are high. Leaders and managers have suitable arrangements in place for monitoring and recording attendance. During online teaching sessions, a report is produced at the end of the session to indicate absenteeism, and poor attendance is

followed up by the planning team. This allows for early intervention if teaching needs to be repeated or if additional actions are required to support absent apprentices.

Trainers ensure that apprentices benefit from the continued development of their literacy and numeracy skills, which are contextualised to their programme. Apprentices become more confident in using these skills, specifically in relation to their roles at HMRC. For example, apprentices in the tax academy focus on writing letters and emails, and making numerical calculations that naturally arise from work tasks such as bookkeeping, tax assessment and undertaking valuations. Managers have arranged for a specialist subcontractor to deliver functional skills programmes, and apprentices benefit from individual online teaching which focuses on the areas they most need to develop. Managers at the subcontractor ensure that the few apprentices who need to achieve functional skills qualifications do so, although the progress that these apprentices make is often too slow.

Most apprentices have a clear understanding of the internal range of roles, the career structure and the progression opportunities that exist within HMRC. They receive informal guidance and encouragement from line managers and access online resources which help them to explore the opportunities available to them. This support enhances their progression prospects, such as applying for temporary secondments to gain broader experience. A few apprentices have gained promotion to more senior and specialist roles during their programmes. However, a minority of apprentices, particularly those on the level 3 investigating officer apprenticeship, do not receive effective careers guidance early enough as wider careers guidance is left until the end of the programme.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place significant emphasis on developing their safeguarding resources. HMRC have a range of appropriate policies and procedures which are followed when required. Trainers ensure that apprentices have sufficient knowledge of safeguarding and know who to contact for advice if necessary.

Managers ensure that apprentices receive a range of comprehensive information to make informed choices about staying safe. Information is circulated via the company internal computer systems, through newsletters and through apprentices' attendance at regional safeguarding meetings. Apprentices benefit from formal discussions with their assessors about the 'hot topics' which managers circulate. Assessors provide good support for apprentices who voice any concerns that they have at work.

Leaders carry out appropriate safe recruitment checks to ensure that trainers are suitable to work with apprentices. These checks include the enhanced civil service security and financial checks.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Maintain the focus on ensuring that the remaining apprentices on programmes in the tax academy stay on programme and quickly complete their apprenticeship successfully.
- Ensure that the small number of apprentices who need to achieve functional skills qualifications do so quickly.
- Ensure that all apprentices receive a structured programme of careers advice and guidance throughout their apprenticeship programme.
- Ensure that trainers receive the support that they need to develop the craft of teaching so that they are better able to support apprentices throughout their programme.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2510851
Address	Langley House Benton Park View Newcastle upon Tyne NE98 1ZZ
Contact number	03000 557 040
Website	www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs
Principal/CEO	Janet Howes
Provider type	Employer provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Capita

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of the tax academy, 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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