

Inspection of Middlesex University

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 June 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	Good

Information about this provider

Middlesex University received its previous full inspection from Ofsted in April 2005. At that time, the only provision in scope for inspection was the level 3 one-year art and design foundation programme. The university no longer offers this programme.

The university now runs a programme of higher and degree apprenticeships from levels 5 to level 7. At the time of the inspection, the university offered 12 different apprenticeship standards. The highest proportion of apprentices were on level 6 police constable, followed by level 5 nursing associate, level 6 business to business sales, and level 7 senior leader. Other programmes with lower recruitment numbers included level 7 academic professional, level 6 registered nurse, level 6 environmental health practitioner, level 5 coaching professional, level 7 risk and safety management professional and level 6 social worker.

The university recruited its first cohort of apprentices in December 2018. At the time of this inspection, there was a total of 1,659 apprentices on programme. The university has focused its early apprenticeship programme primarily on serving the needs of public sector employers. It works closely with several National Health Service (NHS) trusts and county police forces, primarily across the south-east region.

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

Apprentices appreciate the respect and encouragement they receive from their employers and from staff at the university. They enjoy the calm and professional learning environments, both in classrooms and online. Many state that it is a good place to learn.

Apprentices develop an enthusiasm for learning and are conscientious towards both their job and their programme of study. They are attentive in class, keen to share their own experiences and learn from others. Apprentices develop into independent and reflective learners with a positive work ethic, a high level of professionalism and respect for others.

As a result of their studies, apprentices acquire the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to succeed in their job and to progress in the workplace. For example, police apprentices explain how they use role-play stop and search, and conflict management scenarios to help give them skills and confidence, in preparation for operational duties.

Apprentices acquire valuable wider insights on topics such as equality and diversity, British values and ethics. For example, nursing apprentices learn how these topics are relevant when considering patients' values, beliefs, and wishes. Apprentices therefore learn to respect the views and opinions of the patients they treat.

Most apprentices understand how their apprenticeships will help them progress in their respective careers. For example, apprentices on the level 7 academic professional apprenticeship recognise how their qualification might help them gain fellow status in the university sector. However, a few apprentices are unclear of their longer-term career options, and of any further training they might need to continue through their career. The small number of apprentices who do not complete their programme, receive little guidance about alternative career opportunities.

Apprentices feel safe. They understand how to keep themselves safe at work and in training. They appreciate the focus that staff have towards their welfare. Apprentices value the additional support and guidance they receive on occasions such as when they struggle with the pressures of the programme, or when they need emotional support and guidance with more personal issues.

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

Leaders and managers have developed a portfolio of apprenticeships, many of which help address national workforce deficits, particularly around nursing and policing. Leaders have built the apprenticeship programme on strong pre-existing employer partnerships, particularly in the public sector, and also the knowledge and expertise of existing staff. Leaders and governors have a strong focus on teaching apprenticeships that enhance both employer productivity, and apprentices' social mobility. They also focus well on programmes that help public sector employers meet some of the major challenges that have arisen as a result of the pandemic. For example, the level 5 and 6 nursing programmes help support the regional NHS trusts to recruit and train their workforce.

Leaders have overseen significant investment to develop appropriate resources and accommodation, which staff use well to support the quality of the apprenticeship programme.

Teaching staff are well qualified and have suitable vocational expertise in their respective fields. They have very good access to professional development. For those staff new to teaching, managers both require and support the achievement of a teaching qualification. Staff complete a minimum of 20 days personal development, and scholarly activity each year. Managers also support staff to maintain currency in their respective fields. For example, nurses complete essential work-related activities so they can maintain their professional registration status.

Leaders create a supportive and developmental workplace culture for staff. Tutors confirm they have appropriate workloads and receive a good level of support from their managers.

Staff check most apprentices' prior learning at the start of their programmes. They carry out an initial evaluation and briefing to ensure recruits are suitable to join the programme. However, for a minority of the police constable trainees, the programme is more difficult than they expected and they struggle to cope. They find it hard to manage the high pressure of their jobs with a very challenging programme of study.

Staff have worked very closely with employers to design and order the curriculum appropriately. This helps apprentices build their knowledge and skills in a coherent and logical way. For example, teachers structure the healthcare science practitioner programme to include vital underlying science foundation knowledge before moving on to more-complex topics as the programme continues. This enables apprentices to develop their confidence and add increasing value to the work of their employer.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers continue to make very good use of flexible and online learning techniques, originally developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This benefits apprentices, for example, so they can access learning materials such as podcasts, video clips and webinars at a time that fits with their shift patterns.

Staff make good use of assessment to review apprentices' progress. They regularly provide insightful feedback to identify any gaps in apprentices' knowledge or understanding. Staff also review apprentices' progress closely so they can provide encouragement for those doing well, or extra support for those who might need further assistance. Apprentices speak positively about the support they receive from staff. As a result, a significant proportion of apprentices make good progress and work towards successful completion of their programme, with many aspiring to achieve high grades.

A small minority of apprentices are not aware of the possibility of gaining merit or distinction grades at the end of their apprenticeship. As a result, they do not know what they need to do to maximise their potential on the programme.

Over the course of the inspection, attendance and punctuality in lessons was very mixed. While teachers review attendance, leaders and managers do not have ready access to attendance data. They do not regularly review attendance or identify and rectify areas of lower attendance.

Governors and senior leaders have managed significant and relatively rapid growth of the apprenticeship programme since the new provider monitoring visit, despite the added pressures created by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, leaders reacted promptly and highly effectively to put in place appropriate contingency arrangements. As a result, the pandemic had negligible impact on the continued progress and development of the apprentices.

Governors are very knowledgeable about the apprenticeship programme. They provide a high level of support and challenge to leaders, particularly on strategic planning, quality improvement and safeguarding.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Apprentices feel safe and know where to seek additional support should they need it. Leaders and managers maintain suitable learner support processes and infrastructure at the university. They have close links with other stakeholders, including the police and local authorities. Staff receive appropriate training and guidance so they understand what actions to take should apprentices require support.

Apprentices have good access to a wide range of information and resources around well-being, mental and physical health. Staff create good opportunities in lessons to explore these topics. For example, sales apprentices used their skills to produce a series of videos during mental health week for the benefit of other apprentices. As a result, apprentices learn the importance of maintaining well-being so they can successfully continue in their work and study.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should ensure applicants for the policing apprenticeship are fully aware of the exacting demands of the programme before enrolling. They should also continue to strengthen the mechanisms available to police apprentices at all stages of their training to support those who might struggle with the rigours of the programme.
- Staff should ensure they make apprentices fully aware of the career opportunities and training available to them on completion of their apprenticeship. For the small minority of apprentices who do not complete their programme, staff should provide clear guidance on alternative opportunities the apprentices might consider.
- Staff should ensure all apprentices are aware of the possible grades they might achieve on their apprenticeship, and what they need to do to maximise their potential.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133850
Address	The Burroughs Hendon London NW4 4BT
Contact number	0208 4115000
Website	https://www.mdx.ac.uk/
Vice-Chancellor	Professor Nic Beech
Provider type	University
Date of previous inspection	4 April 2005

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Director of apprenticeships, 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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