

Inspection of First Intuition Reading Limited

Inspection dates:

19 to 22 July 2022

Overall effectiveness**Outstanding**

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Apprenticeships

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

First Intuition (FI) Reading is an independent learning provider with centres in Reading and Southampton. It was set up in 2011 to provide accountancy and tax training to the commercial market. In 2017 it started offering apprenticeships alongside its commercial training courses.

There are currently 385 apprentices studying on specialist accountancy or taxation apprenticeships. The majority of apprentices (305) study the level 7 accountancy taxation professional apprenticeship with the others studying level 4 professional accounting taxation technician (38) or the level 3 assistant accountant (38). The remaining four apprentices study on one of three other related apprenticeships.

Most apprentices are over the age of 19 and fifteen are 16 to 18 years old. Nine apprentices study functional skills English and mathematics as part of their apprenticeship; seven apprentices study functional skills English only.

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

Apprentices benefit from a highly supportive, professional and inclusive environment that promotes a strong culture of learning. They enjoy their studies, are listened to and gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Many apprentices gain promotion during their apprenticeship or take on responsibility for more complex tasks.

Apprentices develop highly appropriate professional skills and behaviours swiftly. They make rapid progress in developing confidence as they learn. This allows them to add value quickly to the organisations they work in. For example, employers report how the level 7 apprentices build very effective relationships with clients to gain their trust. They are clear in their communication and can question the validity of information provided to them by their clients before completing their financial computations.

Apprentices are highly motivated and attend their training sessions, whether in person or online, well. They participate fully in all sessions and reflect on their learning with enthusiasm and passion. They value the training they are completing and the knowledge and skills they are developing. If apprentices are not able to attend a session, they are able to access the resources and individual support they need to help them catch up promptly.

Apprentices enrich their learning by participating in activities to promote their own personal development and contribute to their community. For example, they take part in competitions, celebrations of achievement and fundraising activities. Apprentices take pride in volunteering at local community groups, such as a treasurer for a charity or children's activity group, or as school governors.

Apprentices have a thorough and clear understanding of their next steps in the financial services sector. They receive frequent and helpful advice and guidance from their skills coaches and tutors. This helps them to achieve their highly ambitious career aspirations. For example, apprentices know what they need to do to practise in specialist roles such as financial accounting, management accounting, and auditing roles.

Apprentices are very confident in identifying and reporting any concerns about bullying and harassment at the workplace. They have excellent knowledge of what unacceptable behaviours are in the workplace and what actions they need to take if these occur. Apprentices value the discussions with skills coaches, tutors and colleagues to raise awareness and understanding of such topics. For example, apprentices discuss topics such as power dynamic scenarios and whistleblowing at the start of their apprenticeship and subsequent progress reviews. As a result, they know how to keep themselves safe and report concerns to both their employer and training provider.

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

Leaders have established a highly successful specialist apprenticeship provision where apprentices flourish. It meets the needs of a range of employers in their region and the requirements of the relevant sector professional bodies. Their strap line 'where people count' informs the culture and practices at FI Reading. They work extremely closely with the wider FI group, relevant sector bodies, regional skills groups and other agencies such as the Thames Valley Apprenticeship Ambassador Network. This helps them to know their industry, their employers and current as well as emerging needs thoroughly. For example, leaders explained a thoughtful and very well-informed response to the changing dynamics in the accountancy sector and adapting the curriculum accordingly.

Employers endorse the very strong partnership they have with FI Reading. They appreciate the thoughtful and significant support for them and their apprentices. One employer said 'they take employees who often don't have much confidence and get them to walk 7 feet tall'. Employers have a very detailed understanding of what their employees learn off-the-job so they can plan and implement on-the-job learning to consolidate and extend learning.

Leaders have worked closely with employers and the professional bodies to design a highly effective curriculum. Tutors and skills coaches expertly plan the order they will teach topics. As a result, apprentices secure their basic knowledge and understanding before moving on to more complex subjects. For example, level 7 apprentices learn about financial reporting before moving onto the more challenging areas of auditing or taxation. This helps apprentices approach the more demanding topics with confidence and to apply their prior learning.

Tutors and skills coaches are very well qualified and have significant experience in the financial sector. They develop apprentices' learning by illustrating topics with rich examples drawn from their own professional experiences and by encouraging apprentices to reflect on their own on-the-job learning. For example, level 4 apprentices link the new skills they learned at work when they started to work with overseas clients to the topic being discussed with their skills coach.

Tutors and skills coaches have relevant teaching qualifications which equip them with a range of skills they use very effectively. They present information very clearly and they skilfully ensure that apprentices take part in discussions and other classroom activity. They check apprentices' learning frequently and provide plentiful feedback so that apprentices have a very good understanding of their progress.

Leaders ensure that staff teach English, mathematics and digital skills to all apprentices. As a result, apprentices thrive and develop as highly competent and

skilled accountancy professionals who can communicate financial or taxation information professionally and clearly.

Staff use effective strategies to get to know their apprentices very well to support their learning. Where apprentices struggle or fall behind, leaders and staff take swift and highly effective actions to keep them on track for successful completion. For example, tutors provide personalised support to apprentices who are struggling to develop new skills. They provide them with extensive and constructive feedback that helps them build the confidence and skills for assessments. For example, a level 7 apprentice who was finding written submissions particularly challenging went on to achieve the highest mark in the world in a professional qualification examination. Apprentices know that tutors and skills coaches will always 'go the extra mile' to support them.

Leaders have a very secure understanding of the quality of their provision. They use data and feedback from stakeholders extremely well to inform quality improvement priorities. They monitor constantly the impact of their actions and refine them promptly in response to stakeholder feedback. For example, they have recently enhanced how they monitor potential high achievers following stakeholder feedback.

Leaders and staff work very closely with their colleagues across the wider FI group. Staff at all levels participate in professional networking and sharing best practice groups. For example, tutors and skills coaches for each specialist module attend professional discussion groups with their peers from other centres. This helps them to develop exceptionally good teaching resources, plan newer topics they will teach and review how they prepare apprentices for their final assessments and professional examinations.

Governors very effectively support and challenge leaders and managers. Executive and non-executive governors bring a blend of financial sector expertise and knowledge of apprenticeship provision. They know the provision extremely well and benefit from comprehensive reports and papers. They check the impact of their actions against feedback from apprentices and staff. For example, they have recently considered the impact of improvements made to help apprentices study more challenging curriculum areas such as audit.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Apprentices benefit from a strong culture of safeguarding. They learn about very contemporary issues such as healthy relationships, consent and 'gaslighting'. Tutors provide plentiful support. Apprentices are confident their tutor would follow up on any concerns they had.

All staff are appropriately trained. They implement comprehensive safeguarding procedures to report any concerns they have about their apprentices. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) benefits from working with DSLs across the wider FI group to share learning and awareness of emerging challenges. For example, there has been a significant increase in levels of anxiety especially during examination periods. Tutors and skills coaches support apprentices sensitively to manage their mental health. They refer them for additional support where the need is acute.

Leaders and managers have established appropriate external contacts and support networks to make any referrals or to gain advice. For example, their liaison with the regional Prevent coordinator has led to the approval of a 'lock down' policy for responding to any potential security incidents.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1278620
Address	Reading Bridge House Fifth Floor (South Wing) Reading RG1 8LS
Contact number	01189504173
Website	www.firstintuition.co.uk
Principal/CEO	Matt Dyson
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	First Intuition London RELX (UK) Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Head of Education, 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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