

Arden University

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by the Education and Skills Funding Agency and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Arden University is a higher education institution based in Coventry. The university has been offering apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 since January 2019. However, these did not come into scope for an Ofsted monitoring visit until April 2021. At the time of the visit, there were 357 apprentices in learning. Two hundred and eighty-seven were on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship, 68 were on the level 6 chartered manager degree apprenticeship, and two were on the level 6 digital and technology solutions degree apprenticeship. The university works with one subcontractor to provide training to a single cohort of level 6 digital and technology solutions professionals. Leaders have chosen to end this arrangement when the remaining two apprentices complete their apprenticeship.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers demonstrate a clear vision for apprenticeships to form a core part of the university's education offering. They place significant emphasis on providing the opportunity for apprentices to undertake higher level learning to those who traditionally would not have had access to these opportunities.

Leaders and managers have selected a curriculum which aligns closely with the strategic priorities of the wider university, offering leadership apprenticeships that encourage wider participation and progression into senior leadership roles among ethnically and socio-economically diverse groups.

Leaders work closely with employers to develop apprenticeships that are aligned with employers' current and future skills needs. For example, they have worked with NHS trusts to develop senior leader career pathways to break down the barriers which currently prevent progression to senior roles. They have integrated NHS leadership qualifications into apprenticeships to provide valuable additional employer-specific learning.

Leaders ensure that staff involved in the management and delivery of apprenticeships are well qualified and experienced. Most teachers and coaches possess significant vocational experience in the subjects that they teach and coach and use this to contextualise real world examples for apprentices within their learning.

Leaders have developed robust internal quality assurance processes which, while linked to those of the wider university, have been carefully tailored to ensure that these arrangements meet the needs of apprentices and employers. They have created an apprenticeship management committee, which is made up of experienced members of staff, some of whom possess significant experience in apprenticeships. Leaders work closely with other areas of the university to monitor and improve the quality of the apprenticeships they offer.

Senior leaders use the existing university governance structure to provide support and challenge to leaders of apprenticeships. They have also appointed a suitably qualified and experienced external governor with a wealth of experience in further education and higher education who provides challenging external oversight.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Significant progress

Leaders ensure that the curriculum carefully aligns the knowledge-based elements of apprentices' academic learning. They achieve this through taught sessions, assignments, practical masterclasses and activities which focus on developing industry-relevant leadership skills. As a result, apprentices can apply both theoretical models and practical techniques in their workplace.

Apprentices enjoy their studies. They find them valuable, useful and can clearly articulate how they have developed their skills in the workplace as a result of what they have learned. They can clearly explain how they have made positive changes within their workplace through the application of this learning, such as improving team performance.

Coaches work well with apprentices to put in place clear plans to further develop their skills and to close gaps in their learning. Coaches use one-to-one sessions with apprentices to explore the wider skills that apprentices need in their specific job roles. They work with employers to provide opportunities to develop these skills. For example, chartered manager degree apprentices are given the opportunity to attend what would normally be closed board and senior leadership meetings to gain valuable insights and to develop their understanding of high-level decision-making.

Employers value the rapid development of apprentices' knowledge and skills and the valuable contributions they make in the workplace from early in their programmes.

For example, a group of senior leader apprentices are now able to better challenge decision-making at board meetings, which is helping to drive organisational improvement.

Apprentices reflect positively on subjects such as equality and diversity, the 'Prevent' duty, safeguarding, and online safety within their reviews and masterclasses. For example, apprentices can articulate how their new understanding of these topics has led to them being more respectful of colleagues' opinions and feelings. As a result, apprentices are aware of the role they play as senior leaders in promoting these values in the workplace.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

Leaders have developed a culture of safeguarding across the university, which they have extended to their apprenticeships. Apprentices have access to a wealth of support, guidance and training, which helps them to develop an age-appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Leaders have appointed a team of suitably qualified and experienced safeguarding officers and leads across the university. The members of this team are led by one designated officer with overall responsibility. They have also appointed a designated lead for apprenticeships, who leads on all aspects of safeguarding for apprentices.

Safeguarding leads have developed close links with external agencies and bodies that provide them with relevant and current information on issues related to safeguarding across all the regions in which the university works. Tutors and coaches use this information to provide apprentices with useful information on the risks associated with the areas where they live and work.

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