

# Aston University

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1141065

**Name of lead inspector:** Richard Deane, His Majesty's Inspector

**Inspection dates:** 28 and 29 September 2022

**Type of provider:** Higher education institution

**Address:** Aston Triangle  
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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.

Aston University started training apprentices in 2013. At the time of the visit, there were around 1000 apprentices studying level 6 and 7 apprenticeship standards. On the largest programmes, there were 521 apprentices following the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship, 226 on the level 6 digital and technology solutions professional apprenticeship, 130 on the level 6 chartered manager apprenticeship, 34 on the level 7 postgraduate engineer apprenticeship and 12 on the level 7 digital and technology solutions specialist standards.

### Themes

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

#### **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have well-established and strong links with employers and other key stakeholders both in the region and nationally. They work productively with employers to create ambitious degree-level curriculums that enable apprentices to develop the complex and technical knowledge, skills and behaviours that are essential for them to realise their career ambitions, and for their employers' productivity and future success.

Leaders have ensured that apprentices' programmes meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. However, leaders accept that in a few cases, for example in senior leadership apprenticeships, these apprentices require further guidance and support on how to fully prepare for their end-point assessments (EPA).

Leaders make sure that apprentices who have an identified learning need receive the appropriate support to help them to make at least the progress of their peers. However, although most apprentices continue to develop their English, mathematics and digital skills linked to their job role, leaders do not ensure that apprentices close any identified gaps in these subjects.

Leaders and managers continually reflect on their performance and know the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They use appropriate information to assess the quality of provision, including the quality of teaching and apprentices' views. However, a new system to better monitor apprentices' progress and achievements does not currently include all apprentices' information. As a result, leaders and managers do not always receive sufficient information to ensure that leaders' improvement actions enable apprentices to achieve their potential.

Leaders have well-established governance and oversight for the apprenticeship provision. As a result, governors have an appropriate understanding of apprentices' experience and achievements. However, because the information that governors receive is not yet complete, they are not able to challenge and hold leaders to account fully.

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

Leaders ensure that teachers are highly qualified and experienced in their subjects. They use their expertise and recommendations from employers to plan the curriculum so that apprentices build on their previous experience and deepen their knowledge and skills over time. For example, chartered manager apprentices learn about basic financial and management practices so that they can apply these principles in the context of operational and strategic management activities. However, teachers do not always plan off-and on-the-job training with employers well enough so that apprentices benefit fully from their training. For example, a few apprentices on the level 6 digital and technology solutions professional apprenticeship struggle to identify useful learning experiences outside of their current job role in order to ensure that they meet the learning requirements of the standard.

Although most apprentices make good progress on the knowledge aspects of their course, teachers and coaches do not always use information of apprentices' starting points to ensure that they can achieve their potential. For example, teachers do not always adapt their learning activities to accommodate what apprentices already know. In a few cases, apprentices struggle to keep up and grasp new knowledge, while in other sessions, apprentices require more challenging activities to develop their understanding.

Apprentices develop significant new skills and behaviours, as well as the confidence to help them to progress within their current role and gain promotion. For example, a senior leader apprentice used the 'TOWS' analysis to create a learning and development strategy for their company, receiving a promotion as a result of their work.

Apprentices receive comprehensive and useful feedback from their teachers and employers for much of the knowledge requirements in their apprenticeship. However, they do not always receive sufficiently helpful feedback to prepare them fully for their EPA, and therefore do not achieve the grades of which they are capable. For example, coaches do not ensure that apprentices know the evidence required in their portfolios in order to achieve the highest grades in their final assessments.

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

Leaders have a comprehensive safeguarding policy, coupled with the processes and support arrangements to protect apprentices. Apprentices know who to contact through a variety of mechanisms, including online 'record and support', so that they get the necessary help and support.

Leaders follow a strict safer recruitment policy. All staff meet the right to work requirements. Managers have a strong and rigorous oversight of staff checks prior to, and throughout, their employment.

The university has a substantial safeguarding team headed by a senior leader who has received the appropriate designated safeguarding training. All staff receive mandatory safeguarding training, including in the 'Prevent' duty.

Although apprentices receive information about the threats from extremist groups both in the community and online, too few have a good enough understanding to be sufficiently aware of these threats in their daily lives. Apprentices know how to stay safe and adopt safe working practices at work.

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