

# Birkbeck College

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.

Birkbeck College is part of the University of London, based in the London Borough of Camden. The college specialises in offering evening courses for students who also work. The college gained a contract to train apprentices in 2018. Only the apprenticeship provision was in scope for this visit.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were eight learners studying the level 6 digital and technology solutions professional (integrated degree) standard. There was one apprentice studying the level 6 chartered manager (degree) standard. A further four apprentices on the level 7 senior leader (degree) standard were at the stage of completing their final assessments.

### Themes

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

#### **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers offer ambitious programmes, ensuring apprentices learn substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that will assist them in working in the business and technology sectors. For example, tutors teach apprentices up-to-date content, such as techniques to automatically test computer code.

Leaders and managers ensure that the requirements of an apprenticeship are met. They ensure that when apprentices attend evening lectures and workshops, they have agreements in place to work shorter days so that they do not attend these sessions outside of work hours. However, leaders and managers recognise that training apprentices in the evening does not meet their needs or those of their employers. As a result, they have taken the sensible decision to suspend the enrolment of new apprentices while they reconsider this model.

Teaching staff are highly qualified. They provide apprentices with expertly tailored support - for example, when apprentices face specific challenges at work using computer coding languages. Leaders and managers provide training that helps staff improve their teaching. For example, they teach staff how to use technology in the classroom to enable effective discussions in taught sessions.

Leaders and managers promote a culture of high academic expectations and learning behaviours. Apprentices attend well, make rapid progress, and most achieve distinctions in their final assessments. A high proportion of apprentices gain promotion on completion of their programmes.

Leaders ensure that reviews of apprentices' progress are attended by suitable representatives from the employer and the provider, along with the apprentice. During reviews, teaching staff make sure apprentices know what they have achieved and identify appropriate actions to make further progress. However, they do not clearly document actions arising during reviews so that these can be monitored.

Leaders' and managers' governance arrangements do not include sufficient expertise about the requirements of apprenticeships. As a result, leaders' understanding of apprenticeships is still developing. Leaders' and managers' robust quality assurance procedures are limited to the degree component of the apprenticeship rather than the overall apprenticeship programme.

**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 design the content of courses to meet the needs of industry. For example, in a module on innovation, apprentices use what they have learned to make improvements to their company systems and processes. Their employers appreciate and recognise the benefit they are gaining from the apprenticeship.

Teaching staff sequence the curriculum logically. They teach apprentices fundamental skills first before moving on to more complex content. For example, digital technology apprentices start by learning programming, mathematics and software design, and later revisit these areas in greater depth. Lecturers later teach advanced topics, such as cloud computing and mobile computing. As a result, apprentices gain an in-depth understanding over time. However, in a few instances, leaders and managers do not ensure that apprentices' off-the-job training aligns closely enough with their on-the-job training. Where this is the case, apprentices do not apply and consolidate their learning at work quickly enough.

Teaching staff use effective techniques to help apprentices to remember key concepts. For example, they review the content of the previous week at the start of each lesson. Lessons are recorded so that learners can revisit them. Tutors check

apprentices' understanding by setting useful activities based on case studies. If apprentices cannot apply what they have learned to the case studies, staff revisit content or offer apprentices one-to-one support.

Teaching staff give most apprentices timely and useful feedback on written assignments. They provide group and individual verbal feedback on apprentices' draft projects, followed up with detailed suggested improvements. As a result, apprentices improve their written work and know how to achieve high grades. However, in a few instances, teaching staff do not provide feedback to digital apprentices that guides them to improve.

Teaching staff offer high-quality specialist learning support to help apprentices improve their skills, such as referencing and essay writing. As a result, apprentices gain these skills as part of the apprenticeship. However, in too many instances, staff do not consider apprentices' starting points sufficiently. As a result, support is offered too late for some apprentices to achieve well in their early assessments.

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

Leaders and managers take appropriate steps to help keep apprentices safe. They have trained multiple staff to lead on safeguarding. As a result, any concerns are handled swiftly and appropriately. Designated leads have suitable links with external organisations, such as the local authority and local 'Prevent' duty lead, and ensure that staff receive suitable training on how to report concerns.

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices can report concerns and access suitable support. For example, apprentices have personal tutors and access to a variety of systems through which they can gain support from student services. As a result, apprentices feel safe and know how to report any concerns.

Managers recognise that apprentices may need support to manage their mental health. They provide apprentices with access to suitable mental health advisory services and counselling services through the university. They invite staff to take part in specific training to support students with their mental health in the classroom.

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