

Inspection of University of Bedfordshire

Inspection dates:

17 to 20 January 2023

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

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

The University of Bedfordshire provides standards-based apprenticeships in several subjects from levels 4 to 7 across all four faculties of the university. It had 319 apprentices in learning at the time of the inspection. There were 110 apprentices studying the level 5 nursing associate standard, 79 studying the level 6 social worker (integrated degree) standard and 39 studying the level 6 registered nurse degree standard. There are small cohorts of apprentices on a range of other standards, including level 7 advanced clinical practitioner (integrated degree), level 4 associate project manager, level 6 cyber security technical professional (integrated degree), level 6 digital and technology solutions and level 7 senior leader. Most apprentices are aged over 19 years, and none has high needs. Leaders do not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices have very good attitudes towards their studies. They enjoy the opportunity they are afforded to learn and to progress in their careers. Those on the level 5 nursing associate standard take responsibility for additional learning that prepares them effectively for the professional development requirements in the Nursing and Midwifery Council regulations.

Apprentices benefit from the support they receive from staff at the university, from their employers and from each other to make good progress. Apprentices aspire to achieve high grades, and lecturers encourage them to do so. However, the small group of apprentices on the level 4 associate project manager standard find passing the external examination for their professional qualification too challenging.

Apprentices value the fact that staff frequently check on their welfare and well-being and help them to manage any work or family pressures. Despite any interruptions caused by these pressures, most apprentices complete and achieve their qualifications within the planned timeframes.

Apprentices feel safe at work, on campus and when online. Those on the level 4 project management standard apply their learning about the General Data Protection Regulation at work and increase their understanding of the responsibilities they have for safely handling other people's information. Apprentices know how to report concerns such as bullying and harassment should the need arise. They are confident that their concerns will be heard and dealt with appropriately by staff.

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

Leaders have established productive relationships with a range of employers to inform the apprenticeships that they offer. Employers' needs are considered carefully, and any revisions and improvements required are promptly made. Leaders have strong relationships with 13 NHS trusts with which they work collaboratively. Leaders have in place a curriculum to meet identified needs through bespoke programmes and apprenticeships from level 4 to level 7, including operating department practice and midwifery.

Leaders and governors focus strongly on raising participation and increasing social mobility. Leaders help NHS trusts to recruit apprentices from the local community. Trusts benefit from a local workforce and increases in staff retention rates. In recognition of the challenges that apprentices experience from digital poverty, leaders provide laptops, equipment loans and bursaries. Apprentices benefit from high-quality online learning resources to support their achievements.

Leaders do not manage their data effectively. Consequently, publicly published performance data is inaccurate. Leaders do not have effective oversight of aspects such as apprentices' attendance and destinations. During the inspection,

performance data used by managers at faculty level too often differed from that held and used by leaders.

Apprentices benefit from staff who are subject experts with significant sector experience. Leaders ensure that staff receive a range of meaningful professional development to stay up to date in their specialist fields. Staff use this knowledge highly effectively in curriculum and assessment design, and to exemplify their teaching. In healthcare areas, staff maintain their professional nursing status through clinical experience. Staff complete industry certification, such as Cisco Certified Network Associate security instructor and cyberoperations instructor in the digital area. In social work, staff are given 50 hours a year to refresh their practice.

Apprentices apply their new knowledge and skills effectively in their workplaces. On most programmes, there are good links between on- and off-the-job training. Staff hold frequent, meaningful reviews of progress with apprentices and workplace mentors. Apprentices on the level 6 cyber security standard use their new skills and knowledge effectively to identify security threats and to provide solutions to mitigate risk to their organisation.

Staff ensure that learning is carefully and effectively planned. Staff teach a well-considered, integrated curriculum. Staff use a range of effective teaching and assessment methods, such as lectures, peer assessments, mnemonics, online videos and case study analysis. They enable apprentices to build effectively on previous content and to understand complex concepts.

Apprentices make good progress throughout their programme. They improve their standards of work and grades over time. Apprentices receive detailed feedback on the quality of their work. They develop the advanced English and mathematical skills required for their roles and communicate complex information confidently and professionally. Apprentices on the level 6 social work standard also receive detailed developmental feedback on the professional capabilities' framework, which they usefully reflect on and apply to their practice.

Staff do not help those apprentices with significant, existing knowledge of a topic to extend their understanding further. Most staff establish effectively what apprentices already know and can do at the start of the programme and when introducing new learning. However, staff do not use this information consistently to modify the curriculum for apprentices with existing, secure knowledge and skills or to provide increased challenge.

Apprentices with additional learning needs are supported effectively to achieve. Managers and staff ensure that apprentices have access to, and are aware of, the personalised support that is available at the university. Specialist staff produce comprehensive learning support plans that are shared with tutors, employers and apprentices. Apprentices have access to supportive technology such as recording devices and software to help with typing. Apprentices participate fully in their learning using the reasonable adjustments provided.

Leaders do not manage effectively the quality of the level 6 cyber security standard and the level 6 digital and technology solutions standard programmes. This has had a substantially detrimental impact on the quality of education and training for apprentices. Staff in this area do not work closely with their employer partners, and too often, workplace mentors are not involved in reviews of apprentices' progress. As a result, the small proportion of apprentices studying these standard qualifications do not have a good learning experience.

Apprentices' attendance to learning and work is high. In most programmes, staff appropriately monitor attendance and punctuality, including participation in online learning materials. Staff identify quickly when apprentices make slow progress and intervene swiftly to help them. However, in a minority of programmes, such as those for the level 6 cyber security and level 6 digital and technology solutions standards, staff do not track and monitor attendance and punctuality effectively.

Apprentices are fully prepared for future career progression. Many apprentices gain promoted roles and additional responsibilities at work during their apprenticeship. Most apprentices broaden their understanding of the sector in which they work.

Staff ensure that the curriculum enables apprentices to develop knowledge and skills beyond the requirements of the subject studied. Those on the level 6 social work standard gain an increased understanding of social and political issues and are involved in voluntary work. Apprentices feel safe to discuss and explore potentially sensitive issues. Discussions on topics such as sexual exploitation increase apprentices' knowledge of healthy relationships and how to form and maintain these.

Governance is effective. Leaders and governors keep under review the arrangements for governance and maintain effective oversight as the apprenticeship provision grows. Governors challenge leaders effectively and hold them to account for performance and the quality of provision. Governors set sensible targets for the performance of the apprenticeship provision, which they monitor closely.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff responsible for safeguarding have good links with local agencies and organisations to support their safeguarding responsibilities. They have close and effective links with NHS trusts, local councils, the local authority and local police services. Their links enable pertinent and topical issues, such as needle-spiking and far-right extremism, to be shared with staff and apprentices in order to raise awareness of how to stay safe.

The student services team at the university helps apprentices with any concerns they have. Apprentices make effective use of the full range of help available to them, for example mental health and well-being counselling.

Apprentices feel safe at work, on campus and when online. Apprentices can clearly articulate whom to raise concerns with if they did not feel safe and are confident that their concerns would be listened to and acted on.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and governors must improve their oversight and management of performance data to ensure that information shared internally and externally is accurate.
- Leaders must ensure that staff take account of apprentices' existing skills and knowledge to ensure that apprentices with more experience of topics in the curriculum are challenged effectively to extend their knowledge further.
- Leaders and governors must ensure that apprentices on the level 6 cyber security standard and the level 6 digital and technology solutions standard have a good experience in learning on programmes that meet the requirements of their education and training needs and those of their employers.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133841
Address	Park Square Luton Bedfordshire LU1 3JU
Contact number	01582 734111
Website	www.beds.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rebecca Bunting
Provider type	Higher education institution (FE in HE)
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the apprenticeships lead, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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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