Happy Computers

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	58502
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Inspection dates:	6 and 7 February 2023
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Happy Computer was inspected in April 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Happy Computers is a training organisation based in east London and specialising in information technology (IT) and leadership and management training, consultancy and coaching services. Happy Computers gained a contract to deliver apprenticeships in January 2018. At the time of this monitoring visit, there were approximately 180 apprentices on a range of leadership and management apprenticeship standards from level 3 to 7 and level 4 software development standards. All apprentices are aged 19 and over.

Themes

What progress have staff made in using the information they have about what apprentices know and can do at the start of their course to create a personalised and demanding programme that builds on apprentices' existing skills and knowledge?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have put in place a more rigorous approach to identifying what apprentices know and can do at the start of their course. This includes taster sessions that help apprentices and their line managers to understand the new knowledge and skills they will gain from the course.

Apprentices complete a comprehensive self-analysis of their existing skills at the start of the course. This helps them to identify their current level of knowledge and the extent to which the apprenticeship programme will help them. Facilitators use this information in their initial meetings with apprentices to assure themselves that the apprentice will benefit from the course. As a result of this more rigorous approach, staff have a good understanding of what apprentices know and can do at the start of the course.

Facilitators use the information gathered from apprentices to help create a training plan so that apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, facilitators on the level 3 team leading and level 5 operations management apprenticeships help apprentices to develop and reflect on their own

management styles and discuss how they can further develop these within their organisations. Apprentices receive effective support to develop the knowledge and skills they need to be successful on the course.

What progress have leaders made in developing a comprehensive personal development curriculum, which includes impartial careers advice and guidance, to support learners to help apprentices understand the opportunities available to them and to prepare them for their next steps?   **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have started to put together a personal development curriculum aimed at supporting apprentices to develop their skills outside of their apprenticeship programme. This includes sessions on mental health, making the world a better place, supporting people in their communities and personal finance.

Apprentices have access to a good range of personal development resources on their online learning platform. These include access to resources related to British values, as well as links to external resources from the NHS focused on staying healthy.

Facilitators use good resources during their individual coaching sessions with their apprentices. They ensure that topics discussed relating to personal development are relevant to each apprentice and their personal circumstances.

Apprentices have access to a range of information to support them in taking the next steps in their career. This includes support for interview techniques and how to write a CV. Apprentices also have access to drop-in careers sessions. However, too many apprentices were not aware of these resources, and topics were not always being covered in coaching sessions.

What progress have leaders and those who provide governance made in implementing rigorous quality assurance to improve their understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement of their provision?   **Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have a better understanding of the quality of the apprenticeship courses, along with their strengths and areas for improvement.

Leaders and managers have adopted a more data-driven approach to governance. They use detailed monthly reports, which provide a good overview of the performance of the different apprenticeship courses. They combine this data with information from apprentices at the end of each training session. As a result, leaders and managers have a secure overview of the apprenticeship courses.

Senior leaders use the data they have on apprentices to challenge staff on the performance of individual courses. For example, where achievement rates on apprenticeships were low, managers were tasked with rectifying this. Their actions have resulted in a higher proportion of apprentices achieving their qualification and gaining distinctions in their end-point assessment.

At an operational level, leaders and managers track the implementation and impact of their improvement actions well at their management meetings. They use feedback from apprentices and performance data to identify strengths and areas for improvement. However, directors and senior leaders do not have a comprehensive record and overview of all the actions taken to improve the quality of apprenticeships and their impact.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices and their managers understand the requirements and expectations of their apprenticeship and that apprentices can apply their new knowledge at work. **Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers have helped apprentices' line managers to understand the requirements and expectations of the programmes. They provide employers with useful handbooks and factsheets. They also run helpful online webinars and question-and-answer sessions and invite managers to taster sessions, where they can alleviate any concerns or potential issues. In a few instances, line managers do not completely understand the expectations or requirements of the apprenticeship and rely on their apprentices to tell them. This tended to be where an organisation's learning and development team acted as an intermediary between Happy Computers and potential line managers.

Apprentices and their line managers have good attendance at the quarterly progress reviews. Facilitators, alongside apprentices and their line managers, have purposeful discussions about the progress of apprentices and reflect on targets and set new goals. At these reviews, line managers are able to ask questions or seek clarification about the programme or their apprentice's progress where necessary.

Apprentices benefit from interesting programmes of learning. For example, apprentices on the level 5 operations management apprenticeship learn project management skills, such as planning and monitoring of projects. They then apply these skills through activities related to sustainability in the workplace. Apprentices on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship use their learning from the workshops on strategy and organisational change to help them deliver staff training days in their organisations.

Apprentices value the support they receive from their facilitators. When necessary, they receive additional one-to-one support from facilitators, who are quick to reply to questions and requests. This contributes to apprentices enjoying their learning and

being motivated to attend training sessions. Apprentices' line managers value the new skills that apprentices develop and their ability to apply these in the workplace.