

Data Law Limited

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

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Name of lead inspector: Helen Whelan, His Majesty's Inspector

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 3a Bridgewater Street
Baltic Triangle
Liverpool
L1 0AR

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Data Law Limited was inspected in February 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.

Data Law Limited (Data Law) is an independent training provider based in Liverpool, Merseyside. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 71 apprentices studying standards-based apprenticeships. Almost all apprentices were studying the level 3 paralegal apprenticeship. Fewer than five apprentices study level 5 operations and departmental manager. Since the last inspection, Data Law no longer offers the level 3 team leader or supervisor and the level 3 technical salesperson apprenticeships. It specialises in training for the legal profession. Data Law works with employers nationally and delivers all training online.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in monitoring the impact of their quality assurance strategies so that they make swift progress towards all areas of improvement?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers are ambitious about what they want to achieve for their apprentices. They have overhauled how they teach and manage apprenticeships. Following the previous inspection, they took decisive action to stop recruiting apprentices until they had improved the quality of training.

Managers and coaches have redesigned the curriculum so that it better meets the needs of apprentices and employers. The curriculum is well planned, with monthly sessions delivered to small groups or individual apprentices. Coaches set tasks for apprentices to complete before and after each workshop. This helps apprentices to prepare for and then consolidate their learning. All training sessions and reviews are recorded to support quality assurance processes and to enable apprentices to revisit topics later. Apprentices make effective progress on their apprenticeship, and all passed their first externally assessed unit.

Managers have a thorough understanding of their current strengths and areas for improvement. They produce comprehensive self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans to rectify any weaknesses that remain.

Managers set out their expectations clearly for coaches and apprentices. They ensure that coaches have a reasonable caseload of apprentices so that they can provide high-quality, individual support. Coaches monitor apprentices' progress carefully. Managers complete monthly case reviews to check that apprentices are on track and to intervene if they are not.

Managers complete detailed and effective reviews of the quality of training that apprentices receive. This includes visits to lessons and reviews of course materials and apprentices' work. They discuss their findings with coaches and outline what has worked well and what could be improved. However, the review process does not always result in clear actions for coaches to complete.

Leaders and managers are aware that the systems they have introduced, including a bespoke electronic portfolio for apprentices and employers to use, need to be fully embedded. They are also keen to develop their management information systems so they can more easily access data on apprentices' progress.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices receive robust initial advice and guidance so that they and their employers fully understand their commitments to an apprenticeship?

Significant progress

Managers provide apprentices with comprehensive initial advice and guidance before they start their apprenticeship. Apprentices are informed of the curriculum content, different legal pathways, academic work requirements and final assessments. This enables apprentices to make an informed decision about completing the apprenticeship.

Managers provide apprentices with a thorough induction at the start of their apprenticeship. This includes a detailed pre-recorded webinar about the apprenticeship and an individual interview with a coach and their employer. Managers ensure that apprentices understand the range of progression pathways that are available after successful completion of the apprenticeship - for example, progression to a level 4 apprenticeship or taking the solicitors qualifying exam.

Apprentices appreciate the robust initial advice and guidance they receive and the thorough review of their existing knowledge, skills and behaviours. They are keen to improve their legal knowledge and professional competencies so they can perform their paralegal duties effectively and can develop their career. Managers and coaches sequence the curriculum so that apprentices quickly develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, they learn about court hierarchy, how to complete legal aid applications and how to write client care letters.

Managers ensure that employers have a clear understanding of the apprenticeship, the on- and off-the-job commitment and the work that is required. Employers understand how the curriculum is organised and discuss this in the workplace with

apprentices. They support apprentices well in their learning and ensure that apprentices take the time they need to complete their studies.

Employers attend initial advice and guidance sessions. They find the review of apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and behaviours particularly helpful in outlining apprentices' strengths and the key areas they need to develop. Employers report that apprentices, even those new to programme, have taken on extra responsibilities, such as taking the lead in their practice on writing divorce petitions.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that trainers use the information collected on apprentices' prior knowledge, skills and behaviours to plan an individualised programme of learning from the beginning of their apprenticeship?

Reasonable progress

Managers have made significant changes to how they collect meaningful information on apprentices' prior knowledge, skills and behaviours. Apprentices complete a comprehensive skills scan based on the apprenticeship standard. This is used to identify what apprentices already know and can do at the start of their apprenticeship. Managers include a second, more detailed skills scan based on apprentices' legal knowledge. If apprentices rate their prior knowledge as high, coaches discuss this with them to ensure they are on the correct programme.

Managers provide apprentices with more personalised curriculum pathways that are linked to the needs of apprentices and employers. These include a generic paralegal curriculum and other pathways in conveyancing, wills and probate and police representatives. This means that apprentices' learning can be linked to their current and future career aspirations.

Coaches use the initial skill scans to individualise the curriculum for most apprentices. For example, apprentices with prior knowledge quickly develop higher level skills by applying their knowledge to solve problems using the 'Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion' methodology. They complete more complex case studies and apply their knowledge to analyse clients' problems.

Apprentices complete English and mathematics assessments at the beginning of their apprenticeship. These identify gaps in apprentices' prior learning. However, a small number of apprentices wait too long before they can access teaching in functional skills.

Coaches revisit apprentices' initial skill scans with them at progress reviews. They identify effectively what apprentices have achieved and what gaps in learning remain. They work well with apprentices to resolve these gaps through providing extra tuition or support. This means that apprentices can make swift progress. Employers are fully aware of apprentices' progress and recognise the positive impact they have at work.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that staff provide effective ongoing careers advice and guidance so that apprentices are aware of opportunities for further study and other careers in the legal sector?

Reasonable progress

Managers provide apprentices with a detailed overview of progression routes after their apprenticeship. Managers are aspirational in terms of what apprentices can achieve. They ensure that apprentices are aware of a diverse range of career routes, including paralegal executive, chartered legal executive, solicitor or other more specialist routes. Apprentices are ambitious in terms of their long-term career goals. They understand the range of directions that their career could progress, and they are well informed about this by their coaches.

Coaches are well-qualified legal experts. They provide ongoing careers advice and guidance to apprentices as part of the curriculum and apprentices' reviews. The initial group workshop introduces apprentices to law, including court hierarchy, case law and acts of parliament. This ensures that apprentices have a sound working knowledge of different legal principles. This is followed up with an individual session with coaches about apprentices' professional development. Coaches link this effectively to apprentices' career goals.

Managers and coaches ensure the curriculum includes different aspects of law. They support apprentices to understand different sectors and fields, providing up-to-date webinars delivered by legal specialists in matters such as cyber security and sexual harassment law.

Apprentices have access to, and use, a bank of webinars for their broader professional skills development. This includes topics such as mindfulness at work, managing workflow, financial skills and time management. Coaches use monthly hot topics in their reviews to cover broader issues affecting apprentices in their personal or professional lives. Topics include national kindness day, 'clean up your computer' month and mind-body wellness day. Coaches routinely include these topics at the end of sessions to provoke discussion and debate.

Managers have plans in place to introduce 'coffee break' careers talks with legal experts via online webinars. However, this has not yet been implemented.

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