

Astro Martin Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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.

Astro Martin Ltd is an independent training provider that gained a contract in 2019 to provide levy-funded apprenticeships. It recruited its first apprentices in February 2022. At the time of the visit, there were five adult apprentices all undertaking the level 2 customer service practitioner apprenticeship with a single employer based in Oldham. Astro Martin Ltd also deliver subcontracted adult skills provision for a London further education college.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Leaders and managers have been slow to develop and implement an ambitious curriculum that meets the needs of employers and apprentices. They have not designed programmes through which apprentices gain substantial new knowledge, skills or behaviours or opportunities to progress into higher levels of study or employment.

Employers are not sufficiently involved in the design and implementation of apprenticeship programmes. Apprentices are newly recruited to fill customer service roles within a lettings agency. Employers are not sufficiently committed to providing a structured programme that develops their apprentice employees.

Leaders and managers do not have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship provision. They do not sufficiently evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and identify what needs to improve. They have quality assurance processes in place to improve the provision, but these are not having sufficient impact on the quality of education that apprentices receive. Leaders and managers have not put in place suitable governance arrangements to provide external challenge or support to hold them to account.

Trainers are appropriately qualified and experienced in working in customer service settings. However, leaders and managers do not ensure that they undertake continuous professional development to develop their skills in teaching and learning.

Apprentices are not prepared in a timely manner for their end point assessment. They are unaware of the grading criteria and, consequently, do not understand what they need to do to gain a distinction. Although they are all nearing their planned end dates, they are not sufficiently ready to take their end-point assessment.

The funding body requirements for apprenticeships are being met. Employers complete the apprenticeship commitment statement and apprentices receive their allowance for off-the-job training.

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

Trainers plan the customer services apprenticeship in a logical way and start with topics that apprentices quickly need to grasp to be successful at work, for example interpersonal and customer service skills. However, apprentices have retained only a limited understanding of key customer services principles taught early on in the programme. Newly recruited trainers are having to re-teach basic concepts that should have been covered at the start of the apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices have gaps in their knowledge and do not make sufficient progress.

Managers do not assess accurately enough apprentices' prior experiences and existing knowledge and skills. They do not individualise the curriculum, so that it builds on what apprentices know and can do when they start the programme. Some apprentices start with level 3 prior qualifications, while others have level 1, but they all follow the same curriculum in the same sequence.

Trainers meet regularly with apprentices in their workplace and provide effective off-the-job training sessions. They follow a structured teaching programme, which is shared with employers. However, they do not coordinate the off-the-job training, so that this links well to what apprentices do at work.

Apprentices make slow progress towards their English and mathematics qualifications. Although they are nearing the end of their programme, apprentices have not received sufficiently, well-planned teaching to enable them to sit their examinations. Managers do not have a coherent approach towards how to teach English and mathematics.

Apprentices develop their confidence and skills as a result of their training. For example, they learn how to deal with customers, complete end-to-end sales and follow sales leads. Employers feel that apprentices are more professional as a

result of their apprenticeship. They say they communicate with customers more effectively and use more professional email and telephone communication.

Trainers ensure apprentices receive frequent reviews that record their progress and the training they have received. They provide detailed feedback on the knowledge and skills apprentices have gained and set clear goals that they need to achieve.

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

Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate recruitment and vetting policies to ensure staff are suitable to work with adults. They have a suitable safeguarding policy and reporting procedure in place. To date, no referrals or disclosures have been made, so inspectors are unable to check the effectiveness of this procedure.

The designated safeguarding lead is suitably qualified. All staff complete online training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. However, they do not routinely refresh their knowledge of these topics.

Trainers cover safeguarding and radicalisation and extremism at apprentices' induction. They provide detailed resources that explain how to recognise signs of abuse and staying safe online.

Apprentices have a sound understanding of the importance of safeguarding in the workplace. They know how to keep themselves safe and can describe the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, such as right-wing extremism in their local context in Greater Manchester. Trainers check and deepen apprentices' understanding of these areas at progress reviews.

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