

Apex Management Consultants

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 2643472

Name of lead inspector: Steven Tucker, Ofsted Inspector

Inspection dates: 21 to 22 February 2023

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Perivoli
East Street
Ipplepen
Newton Abbot
Devon
TQ12 5SU

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision funded 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.

Apex Management Consultants (Apex) have provided apprenticeships for employees in the insurance industry since 2020. Most of the 150 apprentices are enrolled on apprenticeship standards at levels 3 and 4. Ten apprentices are enrolled on a level 6 apprenticeship. As part of their apprenticeship, each apprentice studies a qualification through the insurance industry's professional body, The Chartered Insurance Institute (CII). Apprentices are located throughout England, and all training and support is provided through online lessons. At the time of the monitoring visit all but one apprentice were aged 18 or over.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Leaders are not sufficiently familiar with the requirements of an apprenticeship or how to design a high-quality curriculum that goes beyond the confines of the professional qualification. They are not aware of the importance of establishing and maintaining regular involvement with the apprentices' employer. For example, employers are not always involved in agreeing a plan for the apprenticeship at the beginning. They do not meet with their apprentice and the provider staff during the apprenticeship to review the progress made in learning new knowledge and skills or agree the targets for the apprentice's next steps.

Leaders do not ensure that apprentices make the most of their time on the apprenticeship to develop a wide range of skills and behaviours. This is because they largely focus on teaching the apprentices the knowledge they need for the CII qualification. Leaders do not help apprentices to plan the time they spend studying or learning from colleagues in the workplace. Employers are complimentary about the service they receive from Apex. However, this satisfaction is largely because leaders do not expect employers to play a full role in supporting their apprentice. Many employers do not provide apprentices with their entitlement of time to study. Several informed inspectors that they see the apprenticeship as a cost effective way

of getting their employees qualified. They do not collaborate sufficiently with the provider to align the apprenticeship to the work that apprentices do in the workplace. As a result, apprentices do not sufficiently practise and apply the knowledge gleaned from their training.

Leaders have been very slow to recognise that they do not have the knowledge, experience or staffing to provide a high-quality apprenticeship programme. Leaders are highly reflective, and have recently identified some of the areas for improvement that inspectors found. In particular, they have recognised rightly that they need to develop their expertise in apprenticeships and have taken steps to secure the external scrutiny and critical support they need.

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

Leaders do not check sufficiently what skills and knowledge apprentices have when they start studying their apprenticeship, particularly those apprentices who have already developed significant levels of knowledge and experience in a job they have been in for some time. As a result, trainers are not able to set apprentices ambitious targets to aim for.

Trainers do not use effective teaching and assessment strategies to ensure apprentices make rapid progress through their qualification. As a result, too many have not completed the work expected of them by the expected end date for their apprenticeship. A significant minority have not completed as many units of the qualification as expected or are taking a break from their apprenticeship because they have not been able to complete work. A significant factor in this is the lack of time that many employers allocate for their apprentices to study. Too often, employers told inspectors that they were happy to release their apprentice to attend a three-hour training session every other week and to revise for an exam, but little else. A small number of apprentices have not completed their English and/or mathematics qualifications. This is because they were not taught these subjects early enough in the apprenticeship or, in a small number of cases, leaders did not identify that some apprentices needed to study these subjects.

Apprentices develop a good knowledge of legislative and regulatory requirements through their academic studies. This helps them to understand how these inform the work of their company. For example, by learning about General Data Protection Regulation, they understand why they have to explain to customers how their data will be handled.

Leaders have ensured that staff involved in the teaching of apprenticeships are well experienced and have professional qualifications. They produce engaging, relevant learning materials that motivate apprentices to learn. Trainers bring lessons to life

with practical examples and use discussions and assessments well to check learners' understanding and to allow learners to question what they are taught.

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

The designated safeguarding lead is trained in safeguarding and receives regular useful updates. Staff understand their responsibilities for the small number of apprentices aged under 18. They have effective links with employers and are aware of the potential need to talk to them about issues concerning their apprentices.

Staff are aware that their apprentices may be in contact with customers who are in vulnerable situations. They teach apprentices how to behave with people in these cases. For example, apprentices are taught about how to talk sensitively to people who are upset after a car accident.

Apprentices receive timely responses and support from Apex staff. As a result, they feel comfortable with talking to them, if required, regarding difficulties in completing their studies and asking for help with this.

Apprentices do not learn enough about how radicalisation and extremism may affect them. Leaders have a clear policy for meeting the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty but have not assessed the risks their apprentices face of being drawn into terrorism.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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