

Lifetime Training Group Ltd

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

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Lifetime Training Group Ltd (Lifetime) was inspected in May 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.

Lifetime was originally established in 1995 and is now a large independent training provider. Its head office is based in the city of Bristol and it has no other permanent offices in England. It has around 900 staff, the majority of whom are field-based learning coaches and tutors providing learning and support to around 19,500 apprentices. Around 80% of apprentices are either studying apprenticeships at level 2 or level 3. Around a third of all apprentices are studying hospitality, and a quarter are studying adult care. The remainder are mainly following apprenticeships in business management, leisure and sport or retail.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that all quality and coaching staff implement the curricula fully so that apprentices receive the aligned high-quality on- and off-the-job training they need and are entitled to, and gain substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours?

Reasonable progress

Leaders are implementing a range of actions to improve apprentices' experience of, and progress on, their training programmes. While there is evidence of improvement, the full impact of leaders' actions has yet to be seen.

Apprentices value the increase in contact time with learning coaches now that around half of the training takes place face-to-face. Quality and coaching staff are now provided with more extensive and more accurate information about their caseload of apprentices. They are using this information increasingly well to monitor apprentices' progress more closely and provide help and support more promptly. Coaches and managers can now establish whether apprentices are recording the time spent in off-the-job training accurately. Employers and apprentices' managers can attend free online seminars presented by Lifetime staff. These provide useful guides to the apprenticeship sector, such as the purpose of off-the-job training. However, there are still instances of apprentices and employers who do not understand fully what off-the-job training entails.

The quality and effectiveness of progress reviews for retail and care apprentices are not always good enough. For example, a minority of reviews for retail apprentices lack clear feedback or specific targets so apprentices do not know how to improve their work. Similarly, care employers' experience of progress reviews is that they do not always give them sufficient detail about their apprentices' progress and so they are unable to provide them with the help they need to improve. Too many apprentices in the care and hospitality sectors struggle to find time for their off-the-job training during working hours. Nonetheless, there are examples of supportive employers who are subsequently providing these hospitality apprentices with either additional training or time to develop their professional skills during working hours.

Too many of Lifetime's apprentices are not learning the substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours expected. This is because the number of apprentices across all apprenticeships who complete their qualifications remains low.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices who have passed their planned end dates have then received the training and support they need to achieve their qualifications to the best of their ability?

Insufficient progress

A high proportion of apprentices are still well past their planned end dates (PPED) and have made slow progress. At the time of this visit, this proportion had grown slightly compared to the previous inspection. The provider's data shows clearly that too many apprentices currently registered in learning have planned end dates in 2020, 2021 or 2022. The proportion who are PPED varies by subject area but is highest for apprentices on care, business administration and hospitality programmes.

Leaders recognise that they need to reduce the number who are PPED. They have made considerable efforts to devise and implement strategies to reduce the number of apprentices who are PPED. However, these strategies have yet to be fully effective. Strategies include using much improved data monitoring dashboards to better identify apprentices who are falling behind so that coaches can provide the support needed to catch up. Learning coaches are expected to generate specific plans to accelerate apprentices' progress and set a new completion date. However, the implementation of these plans is variable. For example, most PPED care apprentices who inspectors spoke with did not know their new end date. Lifetime's quality staff could not confirm that all PPED care apprentices had action plans in place. None of the employers in the care sector who inspectors spoke with were aware of the full content of support plans and had not agreed the actions.

Care sector employers were frustrated by changes in learning coaches and the disruption and delay this caused their apprentices.

For some apprentices, their barrier to completion is not having achieved functional skills qualifications in either English or mathematics. Leaders recently appointed new English and mathematics coaches who between them are currently providing support

in these subjects to just over 400 apprentices. As a result, a few apprentices have now passed their exams.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that their 'learner management system' is used well to record, monitor and evaluate fully the progress that apprentices are making in their acquisition of substantial new knowledge and skills, including English and mathematics, their personal development, behaviours and attitudes.

Reasonable progress

Leaders have ensured that the new learner management system is now fully populated with all apprentices' information. The full migration from the previous system has been completed and it is no longer in use. Leaders have provided some effective practical training in the use of the system for learning coaches and apprentices. As a result, most know how to use it. However, the new system has many functions that many are only just discovering. Even so, they already regard it as a substantial improvement on the previous system. Most apprentices can now confidently access learning materials and coaches can record and monitor key aspects of apprentices' learning. Managers have access to data that they previously did not have. This allows them to see where changes need to be made or support to be put in place.

Apprentices who need to pass functional skills examinations in English and/or mathematics are not all being provided with teaching early enough in their programme. Their learning plans do not routinely consider the English and mathematics' skills they have already. A minority of apprentices do not develop or improve their literacy or numeracy skills quickly enough.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance which equips them well for their current and future careers in their chosen sector.

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have been implementing new resources and arrangements to ensure an increasing number of apprentices can experience structured and well-planned careers advice and guidance. They recognised what was on offer was too informal and lacked a structured approach. They developed two careers-specific training units that all apprentices who started after August 2022 are required to complete. The first provides a thorough assessment of apprentices' ambitions, goals and interests. These are then linked to the training they will receive and illustrates their potential next steps. The second unit includes learning coaches providing apprentices with detailed personalised careers advice. Leaders have provided training to expand coaches' knowledge in this aspect.

However, a minority of apprentices who enrolled before August 2022 do not benefit from the advice now available. As a result, their experience of careers advice is of variable range and depth. Only a minority of apprentices studying care were able to identify any substantial or positive benefits of additional careers advice and guidance. Consequently, the vast majority of care apprentices are not well enough informed about careers opportunities in, or outside, the care sector, including higher education.

Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate reporting and systems that allow them to measure apprentices' completion of the new resources available. Leaders are developing further initiatives to improve the quality of career advice and guidance that apprentices receive before and after they start their apprenticeships. However, these are either in the very early stages of deployment or yet to be implemented. Consequently, it is not possible to judge the quality or impact of these initiatives.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that learning coaches develop apprentices' understanding of topics including equality, diversity, inclusion, the rule of law and protecting themselves from the risks of radicalisation?

Reasonable progress

Most apprentices have a good understanding of equality of opportunity, diversity and inclusion in practice. This is particularly the case for hospitality and care apprentices. The vast majority of apprentices who inspectors spoke with could recall the key elements of fundamental British values. However, some of their knowledge was superficial and they could not explain how this knowledge applied to either their work roles or their personal lives.

Leaders have ensured that apprentices complete mandatory learning that encourages their personal development. The learning helps promote apprentices' deeper understanding of the risks of radicalisation, online safety and equality of opportunity. Most apprentices could articulate how to identify signs that an individual might be becoming radicalised. However, a minority were unaware of any local risks such as county lines or far right extremism or understood how a knowledge of these risks could help to keep them safe. Learning coaches have recently completed a training programme and are now better placed to raise apprentices' awareness of such issues in the future.

Coaches are now able to review apprentices' progress and skill in completing this learning, including the length of time they have taken studying the topics. Consequently, coaches are able to identify and then correct any misconceptions or missing knowledge apprentices may have.

What progress have leaders made in using quality improvement arrangements to correctly identify all of the provision's strengths and weaknesses, using this information to shape accurate, specific, measurable and time-bound planning to improve apprentices' experience?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have completed a fundamental review of Lifetime's quality improvement arrangements since August 2022. This is ongoing, with positive indications of impact, though much is still work in progress. This work is now being led by a director of quality who started employment at the beginning of this year. A key aim of the review is to determine the elements of quality improvement that need to be in place so that leaders can quickly and accurately identify what is working well and what needs to be improved. The quality improvement action plan is tightly linked to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection and will be further informed by the outcomes of this monitoring visit.

Self-assessment arrangements are planned for a relaunch in June this year. This will include refresher training for staff on making judgements, how to conduct effective evaluations of teaching, learning and assessment and how to best use the management information that is now available. The quality team initiated quality cycle updates and a series of rapid improvement projects in February 2023. Leaders recognise that only when new systems are fully in place and are an intrinsic part of how the company operates can their full impact be measured.

What progress have leaders made in appointing one or more governors/directors with extensive practical experience of quality improvement and which has improved governors' challenge of and support for leaders' and managers' implementation of strategies to improve the quality of provision.

Reasonable progress

A new director of quality joined Lifetime in January 2023 and was appointed a board member from that time. The postholder has extensive practical experience of quality improvement in the apprenticeship sector. The board meets monthly and board meetings are well attended. The minutes of the two most recent meetings indicate that board members have been kept progressively well informed about current improvements and strategies to improve the quality of education further. They are now able to challenge and support leaders and managers as they have relevant information to help them understand the quality of apprentices' education.

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