

Inspection of University of Plymouth

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 May 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

University of Plymouth introduced apprenticeships in 2017, starting with chartered manager and digital and technology solutions professional, followed by nursing programmes in 2018. At the time of Ofsted's monitoring visit in 2020, the vast majority of apprentices were studying a nursing programme at level 5.

At the time of this inspection, around 800 adult apprentices are studying on 16 different apprenticeship programmes at levels 5 to 7. Around 520 apprentices study nursing and subjects allied to medicine, most in Plymouth and Exeter. About one sixth of apprentices study a business-related apprenticeship programme. The remaining apprentices study programmes in health and social care, digital and technology solutions professional and civil engineering. The university subcontracts the English and mathematics teaching to one training provider for the very small number of apprentices that require these qualifications.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices value highly the programme they study because it enables them to be successful in their chosen career. They receive the support and guidance they need to achieve their professional goals from experienced subject specialists. Staff consult extensively with employers to ensure that apprentices obtain the knowledge and skills needed in the sector. For example, staff work with a range of healthcare employers based in the South West region to help meet nursing and allied medical professions skills needs. This ensures that apprentices obtain the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in their careers.

Apprentices build their confidence and resilience through well-designed apprenticeship programmes. This is because staff provide opportunities for apprentices to take on additional roles and responsibilities as part of their training. For example, civil engineering apprentices take opportunities to become project managers and to collaborate with multiple stakeholders. Nursing apprentices become mentors to new healthcare support workers, helping them to deliver care and to develop fundamental skills, such as washing a patient. These experiences contribute to the development of apprentices' character positively.

Apprentices are supported effectively by staff who understand their wider support needs. Staff frequently check on their apprentices' welfare. They signpost apprentices to the university support services when needed, such as counselling and mental health support. Staff consider the busy lives that apprentices have when planning training programmes effectively. For example, they provide English and mathematics learning sessions that are bespoke to apprentices training and work schedules. They provide extra learning sessions to apprentices who need it to help them to achieve these qualifications. As a result, apprentices receive the support they need to achieve their curriculum goals.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and managers have ensured that the training they provide helps to meet regional and national skills priorities. Staff have been particularly successful in providing apprenticeships in nursing and subjects allied to medicine. For example, staff work closely with the Devon Partnership NHS Trust, University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust and Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to help meet workforce shortages through the nursing associate programme. Staff have successfully developed and co-designed a curriculum with employers to help meet higher skills needs through the advanced clinical practitioner programme. Staff use these employer insights to ensure that apprentices gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to become highly qualified employees.

Lecturers use their high levels of expertise to present information and demonstrate skills effectively. This promotes appropriate consideration of the subject matter being learned by apprentices. For example, lecturers of digital and technology solutions use their current research to provide apprentices with smarter solutions to help overcome

the challenges of implementing their projects effectively. Lecturers of nursing use their frequent working in hospital wards to contextualise curriculum content. As a result, apprentices become well-informed employees.

Apprentices undertake demanding tasks which ensure that they build on what they already know and can do. This is because lecturers link their apprentices on- and off-the-job training effectively. For example, lecturers of civil engineering use well-planned scenarios relating to unsafe structural environments so that apprentices apply what they know to make appropriate decisions based on their own analysis. Lecturers of digital and technology solutions build their apprentices understanding of the importance of testing and validating their solutions in the laboratory before they are implemented. Lecturers in project management encourage apprentices to reflect and apply what they have learned to their own workplace using real examples of local, regional and global considerations underpinned within challenges of the project environment. As a result, apprentices become more fluent in using the knowledge and skills they learn so that they can apply them in the workplace.

Lecturers ensure that apprentices develop a high level of knowledge and understanding in their subject area. This means that apprentices are well-prepared for their final assessments and can move forward in their chosen careers successfully. For example, most apprentices studying the senior leader programme achieve the highest grade available. Most apprentices studying project management secure a job promotion into a more senior job role or move on to undertake more complex tasks. However, in a small minority of apprenticeship programmes too few apprentices stay and achieve their qualifications.

Managers use quality assurance processes that do not provide them with enough assurances on the quality of training in all areas of the curriculum. For example, the teaching provided by subcontracted training providers is not monitored closely enough. Furthermore, managers' oversight of the tripartite progress reviews focuses on compliance rather than quality. For example, although progress reviews are frequent, staff do not identify and monitor meaningful and ambitious targets that challenge apprentices in all parts of the curriculum. As a result, apprentices are not sufficiently clear on whether they are making swift enough progress from their individual starting point towards meeting their curriculum goals.

Senior leaders providing governance for the strategic and operational effectiveness of the apprenticeship training hold leaders to account effectively. They use well-established committees to provide challenge and useful support to managers. This includes ensuring that managers are meeting the responsibilities they have in providing apprenticeship training.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff with responsibilities for safeguarding are suitably qualified and experienced to carry out their roles effectively.

Leaders and managers nurture a culture of safeguarding in which apprentices' perception of safety is valued. For example, staff at the university have taken the lead on a Home Office 'safer streets' initiative, working with multiple stakeholders across Plymouth on projects to make the campus and city safe. As a result, apprentices feel safe and well supported. They know how to get support from specialist staff at the university if they have a concern relating to safeguarding or their own well-being.

However, a small minority of apprentices develop only a superficial level of understanding of the signs and dangers relating to radicalisation.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that well-informed, meaningful and challenging curriculum goals are identified and monitored effectively for all apprentices frequently.
- Ensure that quality assurance leads to effective actions being taken for improvement for progress monitoring, and for the teaching provided by subcontracted training providers.
- Improve achievement levels of programmes in which too few apprentices stay and achieve their qualifications.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133865
Address	Drake Circus Plymouth Devon PL4 8AA
Contact number	01752 600 600
Website	www.plymouth.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Judith Petts
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Focus Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by an associate dean, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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