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Inspection of University of Newcastle upon Tyne

Inspection dates: 16 to 19 May 2023

Overall effectiveness	**Good**
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

The University of Newcastle upon Tyne began the delivery of apprenticeships in September 2019. At the time of inspection, there were 99 apprentices enrolled on four standards-based apprenticeships. Most apprentices study level 7 standards. Over half of the current apprentices are studying pathways in the level 7 digital and technical solutions specialist standard and around a fifth are studying the level 7 senior leader standard. A very small number of apprentices are studying the level 7 power engineer standard, which is to be discontinued. A further 17 apprentices are studying the level 5 operations/departmental manager apprenticeship. All apprentices are aged 19 or above. The university works with one sub-contractor, M&E Excellence, for delivery of courses leading to functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics.

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

Apprentices successfully develop knowledge, skills and behaviours that help them to thrive at work and benefit their employers. Level 7 senior leader apprentices become skilled at managing change, initiating projects and creating reports and presentations for senior stakeholders. Level 5 operations/departmental manager apprentices acquire skills that enable them to select and recruit high-calibre potential employees for their employers' businesses. Apprentices grow in confidence and take on greater responsibility at work.

Apprentices on level 7 digital and technical solutions specialist programmes develop skills that prepare them well for life and work in an evolving digital world. They benefit from studying ethics so that they have a clear understanding of their responsibilities in developing software. Consequently, they develop a secure understanding of potential positive and negative implications for their industry from advancements such as artificial intelligence.

Apprentices benefit from effective initial information, advice and guidance so that they enrol on programmes that meet their and their employers' needs. They benefit from access to the university's careers services during their programme and for a period of three years after completing. In addition, apprentices have access to a comprehensive range of resources that are available to the wider student body at the university, including well-being provision.

Most apprentices have a good understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism, and those associated with online working. However, they are less confident in understanding local risks affecting the areas in which they live and work.

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

Senior leaders have a clear rationale for the higher and degree apprenticeship programmes that they offer. The apprenticeships address the need for high-level digital, leadership and management skills in the regional and national workforce and economy. Apprenticeships contribute to the university's vision for social mobility and wider inclusion of those who historically may have been less likely to attend higher education.

Leaders recruit and train their teaching staff carefully. Leaders support lecturers who do not have formal teaching qualifications to acquire these. Lecturers are sector experts with industry experience in the modules they deliver. Digital and technical solutions specialist lecturers engage in research in the sector. They maintain their industry knowledge and skills by attending conferences, including on emerging technologies and artificial intelligence. Leaders support teaching staff to attend internal training on effective teaching methods and to work towards fellowships for teaching excellence.

Lecturers use effective teaching strategies that help apprentices retain key knowledge and concepts. For example, on the software engineer pathway for the level 7 digital and technical solutions specialist apprenticeship, lecturers use a case study approach to expose apprentices to the complex problems and dilemmas they may encounter in software engineering. Apprentices enjoy learning different approaches to overcoming problems and draw on these when developing new software at work.

In most cases, staff use reviews of progress well to involve employers in enhancing their apprentices' experience. Skills coaches provide information about apprentices' off-the-job training that helps employers set relevant goals for their apprentices. For example, level 7 senior leader apprentices consolidate their theoretical knowledge by leading on the recruitment of staff in their workplaces. However, in a few cases, reviews of progress focus too much on recording off-the-job training rather than using the information to set meaningful goals for apprentices in their on-the-job training. In such cases, employers do not maximise opportunities for apprentices to apply and rapidly develop skills in the workplace.

In a few instances, rescheduling of classroom learning due to staff illness or staff changes has caused additional pressure for digital and technical solutions specialist apprentices, leading them to struggle to balance the competing demands of study and full-time work. Leaders have rightly recognised such issues and are taking steps to resolve them, including by providing additional staffing.

Of the small number of apprentices who have completed their apprenticeships to date, most pass and achieve merit or distinction grades. The very small number of apprentices at level 5 who require functional skills qualifications receive tuition in English and mathematics from the subcontractor that meets their needs.

Governors understand their roles and take them seriously. They make a strong contribution to the university's vision and strategy for apprenticeships. The governing body includes university, employer and apprentice representatives, all of whom make a constructive contribution to discussion and debate. Governors have good oversight of apprenticeship developments and progress and hold leaders to account for the quality of apprentice education and training. The governing body includes a specialist governor with oversight of safeguarding, to ensure that the provider fulfils its legal duties and responsibilities in relation to the 'Prevent' duty and safeguarding.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The university has a well-established culture of safeguarding. A dedicated designated safeguarding lead (DSL) for apprentices has appropriate training for the role. The DSL, together with the DSL for the wider university, has effective links with a network of organisations that provide safeguarding information and support. These include the police, regional and local 'Prevent' duty coordinators, chaplains

from multiple denominations and Newcastle United Foundation for mental health. Staff understand their role in safeguarding learners. There is a dedicated university safeguarding helpline and an app that apprentices can download and access for sources of support, or to report any concerns about personal safety or that of others.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that staff support employers to identify and maximise opportunities for apprentices to develop rapidly their skills and knowledge in the workplace.
- Ensure that staff work with apprentices and their employers to manage the balance between study and work, particularly at times of competing demand at university or in the workplace.
- Ensure that staff support apprentices to recognise and understand local risks affecting the communities and areas in which they live, work and study.

Provider details

Unique reference number   133852

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NE1 7RU

Contact number   01912226000

Website   www.ncl.ac.uk

Principal, CEO or equivalent   Professor Chris Day

Provider type   Higher education institution

Date of previous inspection   Not previously inspected

Main subcontractors   M&E Excellence

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the senior manager lifelong learning (apprenticeships and CPD), 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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