

University of Chester

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

Unique reference number:	133802
Name of lead inspector:	Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, His Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	4 and 5 May 2023
Type of provider:	Higher education institution
Address:	Parkgate Road Chester Cheshire CH1 4BJ

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

University of Chester 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.

At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 599 apprentices studying on standards-based apprenticeships. At level 5, 88 apprentices were on the nursing associate and 25 were on the healthcare assistant practitioner apprenticeships. At level 6, 96 were on the chartered manager, 62 were on the social worker, 32 were on the registered nurse, seven were on the science industry process/plant engineer and 151 were on the police constable apprenticeships. At level 7, 127 were on the senior leader and 11 were on the advanced clinical practitioner apprenticeships. The provider subcontracts part of the police constable apprenticeship to the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, who co-teaches the level 6 police constable apprenticeship with the university.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in identifying what apprentices already know and can do at the start of their training and in using this information to ensure that apprentices achieve their potential and develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours on their apprenticeship?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have collaborated closely with apprentices and their employers to identify accurately apprentices' starting points, including their prior knowledge and experience, to check their suitability for the apprenticeship. Managers use assessments of apprentices' knowledge and skills to identify areas of strength and the skills that apprentices need to develop. On the rare occasions that an apprentice has prior knowledge and experience, such as on the police constable apprenticeship, managers move them to a different cohort to ensure that they do not repeat learning and can progress more swiftly through the apprenticeship. Managers work closely with the employer to ensure that potential police officers who would not benefit from the apprenticeship follow an alternative route into Cheshire Constabulary.

Lecturers and learner mentors work closely with apprentices to identify accurately apprentices who have additional learning or support needs. Specialist equality, diversity and inclusion staff provide additional and adapted resources for apprentices,

and support lecturers and learner mentors to adapt teaching to meet the individual needs of apprentices who have additional learning needs.

Apprentices talk confidently about the new knowledge, skills and behaviours they develop because of their apprenticeship. Chartered manager apprentices clearly articulate how they apply new learning. For example, apprentices with no prior experience of marketing explain how they use the 7 Ps of marketing to redesign their employer's website to better meet the needs of their target audiences.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices' mentors and employers are routinely involved in the planning of on- and off-the-job training, reviews and in the careers information, advice and guidance that apprentices receive, so that apprentices are aware of further study and career options available to them and make the progress of which they are capable?

Reasonable progress

Apprentices now benefit from frequent reviews of their progress. Apprentices, employers and apprentices' mentors are now fully involved in apprentices' progress reviews, which carefully monitor the development of apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours. Employers receive accurate information about the progress that apprentices make and the priorities for improvement. Apprentices, employers and apprentices' mentors discuss what the apprentice has learned in off-the-job training sessions and identify how employers can support apprentices to apply their learning and practise their newly acquired skills in the workplace. As a result, the coordination of on- and off-the-job training has improved since the previous inspection.

Managers collaborate effectively with employers to adapt teaching to meet the priorities of employers and the individual needs of apprentices. For example, lecturers responded to employers' feedback about training in domestic abuse by including information specific to Cheshire in the public protection modules they teach. Lecturers and employers work in partnership to develop realistic assessments to better prepare police constable apprentices for operational duties.

Managers ensure that lecturers provide most apprentices with useful information and guidance about the range of careers and progression pathways available to them. Apprentices on business and management apprenticeships now receive effective careers advice and guidance and are well informed about potential next steps on completion of the apprenticeship. Police constable apprentices receive information about roles within and beyond the police, including through masterclasses with serving police officers. However, these are not incorporated into a formalised careers programme to highlight the wide range of career opportunities within and beyond Cheshire Constabulary.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that staff prepare apprentices for their final assessments and continue to monitor the teaching of the apprenticeships, including functional skills, to ensure that all apprentices have access to appropriate training and support so that they pass their functional skills examinations, know how to achieve merit and distinction grades in their final assessments, where relevant, and complete their apprenticeship?

Reasonable progress

Following the previous inspection, leaders and managers rightly recognised that the existing quality assurance strategies required improvement. Leaders and managers have worked diligently to improve the quality of the apprenticeship provision. They have implemented a comprehensive and rigorous quality improvement plan that focuses clearly on actions to ensure that apprentices receive appropriate training and support so that they can complete their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers have comprehensively reviewed functional skills training for apprentices. A dedicated team now works closely with apprentices, learner mentors and employers to plan personalised learning programmes for the small number of apprentices to help them to secure the English and mathematics skills they need to pass functional skills examinations in English and mathematics. Leaders and managers rightly acknowledge that further improvements are required, as a few apprentices are very close to the end of the apprenticeship and have not yet passed their functional skills examinations.

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have begun to monitor more closely the quality of training that apprentices receive and the progress that they make. For example, learner mentors swiftly identify apprentices who fall behind in their learning. They skilfully support apprentices to catch up. Most apprentices now remain on programme, where previously half of apprentices left their programme early.

Learner mentors effectively prepare apprentices for their final assessments from the start of the apprenticeship. Mentors, with apprentices and employers, monitor apprentices' progress towards the final assessment during every progress review meeting. Apprentices complete practice tests in preparation for their final assessments. Almost half of apprentices, where applicable, achieve merit and distinction grades in their final assessments.

Too many apprentices on business and management apprenticeships leave their programme early. Only one third of business and management apprentices achieve their apprenticeship. Most of these apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship in the planned timescale. Leaders and managers are currently reviewing these programmes and have suspended recruitment pending the outcome of the review.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that they provide accurate and useful reports to governors that include all information relevant to apprenticeships so that governors can provide effective scrutiny and challenge?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have reviewed and restructured governance arrangements. Comprehensive reports to governance committees such as the Apprenticeship Scrutiny Committee, the Academic Governance and Student Outcomes Committee and the University Council enable governors to rigorously focus on the quality of apprenticeship programmes. For example, governors use a range of information to carefully scrutinise the business and management apprenticeships. They challenge leaders and managers about the quality of these apprenticeships and apprentices' achievements. Governors were instrumental in the decision to suspend recruitment to business and management apprenticeships. Governors, and those responsible for governance at a range of levels, challenge leaders and managers effectively and hold them to account for their actions.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023