Inspection of University of Keele

Inspection dates: 13 to 16 June 2023

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

Information about this provider

The University of Keele is based in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. At the time of the visit, there were 450 apprentices, all of whom were on standards. Of these, 112 were on the level 7 senior leader, 60 were on the level 5 nursing associate, 59 were on the level 6 registered nurse degree, 54 were on the level 6 data scientist (integrated degree), 45 were on the level 7 advanced clinical practitioner (integrated degree), 31 were on the level 7 academic professional, 21 were on the level 6 enhanced clinical practitioner, 18 were on the level 7 research scientist, 12 were on the environmental practitioner and 38 were on three standards covering specialist fields in nursing and medicine. There were also 44 adult learners on skills bootcamps. Of these, 30 were on the smart energy transition and 14 were on the net zero and place-based decarbonisation course.

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

Apprentices and learners consistently demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning. The expectations of behaviour and conduct set by the university encourage apprentices to build positive relationships in the workplace.

Apprentices and learners gain in confidence and professionalism through their learning. For example, data scientist and environmental practitioner apprentices complete work-based projects which they present confidently to their employers, voicing proposals for change and improvement to their businesses.

Most apprentices have a range of opportunities to develop as active citizens. For example, enhanced clinical practitioner apprentices train prison officers on mental health conditions in perinatal care to enable them to support pregnant prisoners. Adults on the net zero and place-based skills bootcamp propose solutions for businesses to operate more sustainable practices, such as promoting cycle to work schemes.

The majority of apprentices and adults engage in their sessions and online learning. Where there are inconsistencies in attendance on some apprenticeships, these apprentices miss valuable learning.

Apprentices and learners maintain positive and respectful relationships with their lecturers. They feel safe from harassment or discrimination and know how to report any behaviours that might put them at risk.

Most apprentices know how to keep themselves safe at work and know of the broad risks from extremist activity. However, some apprentices have a superficial understanding of the risks in the areas in which they live and work.

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

Leaders have a clear strategy to offer apprenticeships and skills bootcamps that meet regional and national skills needs. They work with employers and partners to co-create a well-designed curriculum for apprenticeship and adult programmes. For example, they have recently worked with a local NHS trust to offer apprenticeships to help fill skills shortages in radiology departments, training non-registered assistant practitioners in radiography and registered radiographers.

Leaders have embedded the quality assurance of the apprenticeship curriculum into the schools. They have put in place a range of groups to support this communication, which help facilitate discussions about apprenticeships and report into the university quality processes. As a result, leaders respond quickly to improve identified areas of development, such as retention on the senior leader apprenticeship.

The university council has an appropriate understanding of apprenticeship and skills programmes. It is aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, which allows it to challenge areas for development and support new initiatives, such as the development of skills bootcamps.

Lecturers have extensive experience and expertise. For example, lecturers on the environmental practitioner apprenticeship have experience working for an environment agency or as an ecological consultant. They use real-world examples to explain key learning points through their experiences. As a result, apprentices develop the skills which reflect the current and future needs of the sectors that they work in.

Managers sequence the curriculum to help apprentices to develop an understanding of key concepts. For example, level 6 data scientist apprentices learn core mathematical concepts, which they use in problem-solving and later apply to complex workplace activity. As a result, apprentices improve their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time.

Lecturers do not routinely use the identified starting points of apprentices to inform learning plans. As a result, some apprentices repeat learning and do not make progress as swiftly as they should. Where lecturers use these assessments effectively to plan learning, such as in the nursing associate and environmental practitioner apprenticeships, apprentices make timely progress.

Employers value the apprentices they employ. They allow them time off the job to develop the skills that they need and to attend tripartite reviews. However, these meetings do not always help apprentices to link on- and off-the-job training and to practise these skills in the workplace. As a result, some apprentices do not link the theory they are being taught to workplace activity quickly enough.

Most apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills. They improve their academic writing skills and develop higher-level reading skills. Where mathematics is part of the curriculum, they develop their skills further. For example, in data science, apprentices learn to interpret and critically evaluate data and statistics contained in academic papers.

Lecturers on skills bootcamps support those with learning difficulties effectively. Learners use a virtual learning environment which seeks to support those with specific needs well, for example by using interactive tools which convert written text to speech for those with dyslexia.

Lecturers support apprentices well in understanding the requirements of end-point assessment (EPA). They embed this throughout the apprenticeship, to ensure that apprentices are well prepared. As a result, the majority of apprentices pass their EPA at the first attempt, many with high grades.

The majority of apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours which they use effectively to develop their workplace practice. For

example, advanced clinical practitioner apprentices now take a more holistic approach to patient assessment and diagnosis rather than solve the immediate problem.

Adult learners develop into better-skilled practitioners. They take more responsibility at work and apply their new knowledge well. For example, they undertake carbon footprint calculations to understand the impact of the workplace and establish how to make their employer more sustainable.

The majority of apprentices completing their studies progress to positive destinations, such as higher studies or promotion. Learners on skills bootcamps quickly use the knowledge and skills they have learned to gain more responsibility in the workplace. For example, net zero and place-based decarbonisation learners have expanded their knowledge to include sustainability and net zero technology and are now sharing the net zero agenda with workplace colleagues.

The university has in place a careers service which is available to all apprentices. Most apprentices are aware of this; however, they do not access it. As a result, the apprentices' employer is responsible for the vast majority of careers development, which does not always help apprentices understand the wider opportunities available to them.

Adult learners benefit from detailed careers advice. Lecturers include discussions about next steps into lessons, which allows learners to make decisions about their career development and study. As a result, a few learners progress on to further study or decide to pursue careers better linked to their learning.

Safeguarding

Leaders have in place a range of appropriate safeguarding and safer recruitment policies. They take a holistic approach to well-being, in which the formal safeguarding process sits. There is support available to help apprentices and learners, including financial and mental health support.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) works with a team of trained DSLs. They use a 'hub and spoke' model, where DSLs from the central team work with individual schools to provide support for safeguarding referrals. They put in place support based on the concern – monitoring, referral to wider university services and serious risk. As a result, apprentices and learners can access the appropriate support that they need.

Leaders are responsive to the changing safeguarding concerns in the region. They have in place a variety of initiatives to provide support; these include a trained domestic violence team to support apprentices and learners.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that progress reviews involving the apprentice, workplace mentor and work-based learning officers are used to help employers to plan relevant and timely workplace activity to allow apprentices to practise what they have learned.
- Leaders should ensure that all lecturers use apprentices' prior experience and skills to develop a clear and logically sequenced plan which considers their individual learning needs.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices receive impartial careers advice, so that they are aware of the full range of progression opportunities available to them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133883
Address	Keele Staffordshire ST5 5BG
Contact number	01782621111
Website	https://www.keele.ac.uk/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Vice-Chancellor Professor Trevor J McMillan, OBE
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the pro vice-chancellor (education), 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

Sharon Dowling, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Helen Morgan	His Majesty's Inspector
Ann Minton	Ofsted Inspector
Gemma Hart	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Thompson	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Parton	His Majesty's Inspector
Beth Selwood	Ofsted Inspector

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