

Alliance Learning

Reinspection monitoring visit report

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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This is the first reinspection monitoring visit to Alliance Learning following publication of the inspection report on 18 April 2023 which found the provider to be inadequate overall.

Alliance Learning is based in Horwich near Bolton, Greater Manchester. It is part of the University of Bolton Group. At the time of the visit, the provider had 303 apprentices studying apprenticeships at levels, 2, 3, 5 and 7. Around half of the apprentices were aged 16 to 18 years and half aged over 19. Apprentices follow 12 apprenticeships, 11 of which are standards-based, and one is a framework. The large majority of apprentices study apprenticeships in engineering with the rest following business and professional apprenticeships. Leaders work with employers across three regions of England with the vast majority located in the North West.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in strengthening their safeguarding processes and procedures to ensure that apprentices are safe and that all staff have the knowledge and understanding they need to identify, report and follow up safeguarding concerns effectively?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have put in place appropriate actions to respond to the safeguarding concerns raised at the previous inspection. They have made reasonable progress in strengthening their safeguarding processes and procedures. Leaders have appointed two additional members of staff to the safeguarding team.

Leaders have put in place a range of training to improve how staff respond to safeguarding and welfare issues. Tutors understand when and how to report concerns and do so promptly using the online reporting system. Safeguarding leaders and officers benefit from the training that they attend such as suicide prevention. They are more confident to ask apprentices difficult questions about their well-being such as feelings of self-harm and suicide.

The safeguarding team respond promptly to safeguarding concerns. The team swiftly follow up and act on concerns raised. Safeguarding leaders make appropriate referrals to external agencies when needed. They keep detailed, confidential records of ongoing cases. The safeguarding team meet frequently with apprentices to follow up on their concerns and ensure their well-being.

Apprentices feel safe and know how and who to raise concerns with, should they arise. They value the activities that develop their understanding of safeguarding further such as alcohol and drug awareness talks.

Leaders are aware that they need to broaden their focus on local safeguarding issues to include all regions where apprentices are located. They need to further identify the local risks where apprentices live and work.

What progress have board members made in providing sufficient challenge to leaders and holding them to account to ensure that rapid improvements to safeguarding arrangements and the engineering curriculums have been put in place?

Reasonable progress

Board members have made reasonable progress in the scrutiny and challenge they provide to leaders around the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. Following the previous inspection, board members swiftly appointed a new CEO and more recently a new quality manager. Leaders provide reports to board members that are comprehensive. They provide useful information about the progress that leaders are making to improve safeguarding arrangements and the engineering curriculums. Board members challenge leaders about the impact of staff training, such as feedback to apprentices.

Membership of the board of trustees has been strengthened. Additional appointments include a board member with considerable educational experience and a safeguarding board member, who has extensive experience of safeguarding. Board members challenged leaders to provide a trend analysis of safeguarding cases. The subsequent report highlighted that most safeguarding cases were concerns around depression, anxiety and stress. This has led to the introduction of mental health training for staff, board members and apprentices.

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that tutors use apprentices' starting points effectively to plan an individualised curriculum for apprentices and that they provide apprentices with effective feedback on their written work, so that they know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve? What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices have a thorough understanding of the requirements of their final assessments and the grades that they could achieve in their apprenticeship?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, leaders have not taken on any additional apprentices because the funding body has suspended any new starts. In the meantime, leaders have put in place clear plans to improve the way in which they will assess what new apprentices know and can do at the start of their apprenticeship. Tutors have begun to revisit the starting points of existing apprentices to identify any gaps in their current knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, engineering apprentices

attend additional support sessions to develop their understanding of topics such as trigonometry and equations.

Leaders have put in place a range of training for staff to develop their skills in giving feedback to apprentices. In most cases, tutors provide high-quality oral feedback. For example, following feedback, engineering apprentices ensure sufficient penetration of a weld while undertaking vertical welding tasks. Tutors have improved the quality of the feedback that they provide to apprentices on their written work, so that apprentices know what they need to improve. However, apprentices are not always clear about how to improve their work because tutors do not clearly outline the actions that they need to take to make it better. Leaders have planned more training sessions to improve the quality of feedback further.

Most apprentices have a well-developed understanding of the requirements of their final assessments and the grades that they could achieve. They are more aware of what they need to do to be successful. Employers are clear about the requirements. A few employers conduct professional conversations in which apprentices discuss the skills that they have developed.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices' on- and off-the-job training is planned and coordinated effectively so that apprentices can swiftly practise, improve and hone the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to be a productive employee?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have made reasonable progress in ensuring that apprentices' on- and off-the-job training is planned and coordinated effectively. They have taken clear actions to ensure that employers are more involved in the apprentices' learning journey, such as participation in the reviews of their progress. Where employers are fully involved, apprentices make faster progress through their studies because their employers ensure that they practise in the workplace the skills they are learning. Leaders have plans in place to ensure that improvements are embedded across all apprenticeships.

What progress have leaders made in developing apprentices' English and mathematical skills early on in their apprenticeship?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have introduced suitable actions to develop most apprentices' English and mathematical skills earlier in their apprenticeship. They have made reasonable progress in collecting and assessing information about apprentices' knowledge of English and mathematics at the start of their apprenticeship. Apprentices complete assessments to identify their strengths and weaknesses in English and mathematics. Tutors use the results of the assessments to target apprentices' areas for development. Level 5 operations or departmental manager apprentices develop their report writing and evaluation skills. Engineering apprentices develop work-related

advanced mathematical skills. They calculate resistances, material density and tolerances to ensure the accuracy of their work.

Apprentices who need to achieve functional skills qualifications benefit from attendance at individual and small group sessions. Tutors focus on developing apprentices' understanding of the topics that they struggle to understand such as punctuation. However, a few apprentices studying functional skills in English do not know how soon they will be ready to take the examinations that they need to achieve to move through their apprenticeship.

What progress have leaders made in providing a personal development curriculum that apprentices can participate in and benefit from to broaden their experience beyond the requirements of their apprenticeship? To what extent do apprentices have access to high-quality, impartial careers information, advice and guidance throughout their apprenticeship, so that they know the full range of opportunities and career pathways that are available to them? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have made reasonable progress in putting into place actions to improve the personal development curriculum and ongoing careers advice and guidance for apprentices.

Leaders now provide a greater range of activities to help apprentices develop their interests and talents beyond their main vocational curriculum. Apprentices benefit from a recently reinvigorated and more purposeful tutorial curriculum. They take part in activities, including sustainability workshops, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and money management talks, and visits to industry conferences about innovative technologies. Leaders recognise that they still have work to do to provide a comprehensive personal development programme for all apprentices.

Leaders ensure that apprentices benefit from comprehensive initial information advice and guidance prior to starting their apprenticeship. Most apprentices feel that the apprenticeship they are studying matches their current career aspirations. Leaders have not yet ensured that apprentices routinely benefit from a well-planned careers education programme. Apprentices receive ad-hoc information from their tutors and line managers about potential next steps. Leaders have begun to plan a careers education programme for the start of the new academic year.

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