

Inspection of University of Reading

Inspection dates: 27 to 30 June 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

The University of Reading, operating as the Henley Business School, has been registered to provide levy-funded apprenticeships since 2017. Henley Business School offers apprenticeships in business management, finance and digital skills on behalf of medium and large public- and private-sector organisations, mostly located in south-east England.

At the time of the inspection, 1,200 apprentices were studying standards-based apprenticeships from level 5 to level 7. There were 957 apprentices on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship, 182 apprentices on the level 6 chartered manager degree apprenticeship, 44 apprentices on the level 7 digital and technology solutions specialist apprenticeship and 12 apprentices on the level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist apprenticeship. A very small number of apprentices were enrolled on the level 6 improvement leader and level 5 operations manager apprenticeships. All apprentices were over the age of 19.

Henley Business School works with North Hertfordshire College as its subcontractor to teach apprentices who are studying functional skills English and maths.

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

Apprentices are highly positive and motivated about their learning. They respond swiftly to the high expectations staff set for them and develop their own professionalism within their workplaces.

Apprentices gain valuable knowledge, skills and behaviours that they use to benefit their colleagues and clients. For example, level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist apprentices constructively challenge views about risks in discussions at work. Level 7 senior leader apprentices develop facilitative management styles that empower their colleagues to make effective contributions. As a result, their managers and other senior colleagues appreciate the rapid and positive impact they have on their organisations' strategic priorities.

Apprentices work hard to achieve their goals. Staff support them well by providing them with helpful tools and strategies. For example, apprenticeship tutors help level 6 chartered manager apprentices to develop professional behaviours such as demonstrating curiosity, managing their time and dealing with pressure. Consequently, apprentices take responsibility quickly for their own learning, and most achieve high grades in their final assessments.

Apprentices grow swiftly in confidence through the skills they develop. For example, learning coaches teach level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist apprentices useful techniques to help with managing anxiety. Staff and employers nominate level 7 digital and technology solutions apprentices for awards to recognise their work. As a result, they develop resilience and take pride in their achievements.

Apprentices can access appropriate impartial careers advice and guidance from the university's careers service. For example, apprentices may attend up to three individual coaching sessions to plan their future development. Staff schedule additional webinars to offer advice and guidance, including for apprentices who have been made redundant. Although most apprentices are aware of these opportunities, only a small minority make effective use of them to plan their next steps.

Most apprentices do not benefit from opportunities to develop and deepen their understanding of fundamental British values. They are unable to apply these to their job roles or training. Leaders are working to ensure that staff promote British values more effectively, but it is too early to see the full impact.

Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe, including when they are online. They have a confident understanding of how to report any concerns. Level 6 chartered manager apprentices feel safe because of their programme's professional culture and promote this in their own workplaces.

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

Leaders have a clear and focused strategic vision for their apprenticeship provision.

This builds on Henley Business School's experience with higher-level management qualifications and vocational learning. As a result, its apprenticeship courses address regional and national skills needs effectively and improve business productivity.

Leaders and managers ensure that they plan the order of apprentices' training carefully so that they secure essential knowledge before progressing to more advanced skills. For example, level 6 senior compliance and risk specialist apprentices learn first about stakeholders, markets and regulatory instruments before developing these topics to explore corporate governance, ethics, culture and accountability. Level 7 digital and technology solutions apprentices study the essentials of leadership before choosing between pathways that apply these skills to their technical roles. Consequently, apprentices apply their knowledge swiftly and securely to their professional responsibilities.

Apprenticeship tutors, coaches, apprentices and line managers work together very well to ensure that apprentices' work and training are well coordinated. For example, level 7 senior leader apprentices work with colleagues to apply their learning about topics such as hybrid working swiftly in work-based projects that have a broad impact for their organisations. However, leaders do not ensure that employers plan apprentices' learning at work effectively before they start their programmes. For example, too many line managers do not know what training they should be providing and have not agreed a training plan. As a result, although most apprentices apply their learning in the workplace well, a small minority have an excessive volume of work to complete as they approach the end of their apprenticeship.

Staff use appropriate, engaging and challenging activities to help apprentices to explore their learning and apply it effectively in their workplaces. For example, level 7 senior leader apprentices use action learning sets to challenge one another on their application of key concepts in their organisations, such as UN sustainability goals. Level 6 chartered manager apprentices can explain project management tools such as stakeholder matrices and how they have made use of them in their roles at work. Consequently, apprentices apply new concepts at work repeatedly to ensure that they incorporate them into their long-term memory securely.

Apprentices benefit from helpful feedback and support that enables them to improve the quality of their work. For example, level 7 senior leader coaches and tutors provide apprentices with feedback that shows them clearly where their skills and knowledge are secure and where they need to do additional work. Staff assess apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) thoroughly to ensure that they consider their individual needs and support them to develop learning strategies to manage assignments and overcome challenges with academic writing. As a result, apprentices, including apprentices with SEND, make swift progress and produce work of a high standard.

Highly qualified and experienced staff use their academic knowledge and expertise as practitioners to help apprentices reflect on their learning and map this to current research and their vocational contexts. For example, staff teaching strategic

marketing draw on their own research to explain critical success factors and how they relate to value creation. Consequently, apprentices use the knowledge they have learned to move on swiftly to senior promoted roles such as product line manager and head of strategy.

Leaders and managers make thorough checks on the quality of their subcontractor's work with apprentices to teach them English and mathematics and assure themselves that it is effective. As a result, apprentices studying English and mathematics progress well and nearly all achieve their qualifications.

Leaders manage the well-being and workload of most staff effectively. For example, they implement flexible working arrangements and have appointed mental health champions. Consequently, most staff feel well supported and valued in their roles.

Members of the university's apprenticeship board are well qualified and experienced. They work effectively within the university's broader arrangements for governance to provide appropriate oversight of leaders. As a result, they evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their provision effectively and use this to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding team, including the safeguarding lead for apprentices and the university's designated safeguarding lead, are well experienced and qualified. They ensure that staff benefit from appropriate safeguarding training at induction that they update regularly.

Leaders ensure that staff report, identify and manage welfare and safeguarding concerns effectively. They have implemented a suitable action plan to meet the requirements of the 'Prevent' duty.

Leaders and managers establish staff's right to work in the UK and check the qualifications they require for their roles working with apprentices appropriately.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that apprentices can apply their understanding of British values to their job roles and training effectively.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices have high-quality opportunities to learn about and prepare for their next steps.
- Leaders should ensure that they work with employers when apprentices start their programmes so that they plan apprentices' training at work effectively.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133870
Address	Whiteknights House Whiteknights Reading Berkshire RG6 6UR
Contact number	01189875123
Website	www.reading.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Robert Van de Noort
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	North Hertfordshire College

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of post-experience and apprenticeship programmes, 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

David Towsey, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Emma Leavey	His Majesty's Inspector
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Paul Addis	Ofsted Inspector
Rachael Johnstone	Ofsted Inspector
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