

Inspection of Buckinghamshire New University

Inspection dates: 19 to 22 September 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	Good

Information about this provider

Buckinghamshire New University is a higher education institution with campuses in High Wycombe, Aylesbury and Uxbridge. The university has been an apprenticeship provider since 2018. At the time of inspection, there were 1,012 apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships from level 5 to level 7. Most apprentices are aged 19 years old or over and none are in receipt of high-needs funding. More than half are first in family to attend higher education. One third are from underrepresented ethnic groups. Approximately 300 apprentices were studying the level 6 police constable degree apprenticeship, 250 apprentices were studying the level 6 registered nurse and 175 apprentices were studying the level 5 nursing associate. Smaller numbers of apprentices were studying level 6 and level 7 apprenticeships in areas including social work, operating department practitioner, advanced clinical practitioner, academic professional, digital technology solutions professional and product design and development engineer.

The university works with three subcontractors. They work in partnership with Thames Valley Police to teach the level 6 police constable apprenticeship, and with Oxford Health NHS Trust to teach the level 5 nursing associate apprenticeship. They work with Runway Training, who teach level 2 functional skills qualifications for the small number of apprentices who need them.

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

Most apprentices have very positive attitudes to their learning and are strongly motivated to complete their studies. They value the experience and expertise of skilful staff who teach them well. Apprentices benefit from high-quality resources and learning spaces which enable them to safely practise technical skills. Most apprentices rightly feel well supported by the wide network of help provided by the student welfare and well-being team. As a result, most apprentices grow in confidence and competence, they remain in learning and achieve well.

A small number of level 7 senior leader apprentices who experienced high staff turnover in the teaching team have become frustrated and lack motivation. Consequently, too many make slow progress or leave this apprenticeship before completing their final assessment.

Apprentices develop their character and confidence well through their apprenticeship. Most work in complex, challenging public-facing sectors where they need to react quickly and professionally. They build the resilience, skills and behaviours they need swiftly to manage these roles effectively. For example, social worker apprentices learn how to advocate confidently for the people they represent during multidisciplinary meetings. Police constable apprentices understand well the public expectation that they will take control of situations and bring order, which they do.

Apprentices benefit from useful, impartial careers advice and guidance that enables them to understand their next steps well. The dedicated careers teams host careers fairs and helpful drop-in sessions that support apprentices with job searches and interview preparation. Consequently, apprentices are well supported to make informed choices about their career options. Most apprentices stay with their employer at the end of their apprenticeship. Many gain promotions as a direct result of doing the apprenticeship.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns or seek support at work and at the university. They understand their responsibility for health and safety in the workplace. Nursing apprentices learn to maintain professional boundaries carefully on the wards and know how to move patients safely. Police constables learn to de-escalate situations and know how to keep themselves and others safe in violent environments. As a result, they safeguard patients and service users well.

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

Leaders and managers have designed an apprenticeship offer which meets local and regional skills needs well. They have grown their apprenticeship offer carefully, building on strong employer links in sectors such as healthcare and policing. They have responded to local skills improvement plan priorities by creating a new apprenticeship-led school of engineering.

Leaders rightly recognise that apprenticeships fit well with the mission and vision of the university. Staff carefully target recruitment of apprentices who may otherwise not be able to attend university. They adapt teaching timetables to accommodate apprentices' personal and professional needs, for example through later start times. Leaders have a clear commitment to promoting social mobility and inclusion, which they fulfil well.

Staff have planned the curriculum logically, so apprentices build their understanding carefully. For example, nursing associate apprentices learn about patient observations in simulation suites, before using these skills on hospital wards. Operating department practitioners use crash trolleys and computer-linked dummies to practise managing patients in cardiac arrest. Digital technology solution professionals learn about digital innovations through live client briefs. As a result, apprentices apply their new knowledge, skills and behaviours in the workplace confidently.

Lecturers have extensive sector experience. Leaders support staff to improve their pedagogy well, for example by helping staff to gain teaching qualifications. Most lecturers use their sector knowledge and skills effectively to plan and teach engaging lessons. They draw on case studies and scenarios to contextualise learning well. As a result, apprentices can relate what they learn to the workplace quickly and apply new learning easily.

Staff work closely and purposefully with employers to evaluate and improve apprenticeship programmes. For example, in response to employer feedback staff introduced the 'immediate life support' award for operating department practitioner apprentices. They adapted assessments for nursing apprentices to include patient handovers. As a result, apprentices develop the skills which reflect the needs of the sectors that they work in well.

Employers participate well in timely, helpful apprentice progress reviews. Consequently, they are clear about the progress their apprentices are making and know how to support them effectively in the workplace.

Staff identify and support most learners with additional needs effectively. For example, the university inclusion team uses helpful support plans to prepare apprentices for assessments. Consequently, most apprentices with additional learning needs achieve in line with, or better than, their peers. However, a very small number of apprentices with learning difficulties or disabilities did not have their needs identified quickly enough. As a result, they have not made progress as quickly as they could.

Staff provide a wide range of activities, support services, clubs and societies that are available to all students at the university. Although apprentices are aware of these opportunities, few engage. Leaders do not track apprentice engagement in the wide personal development and enrichment offer they have. As a result, they cannot ensure that apprentices benefit from the services or target areas that will add most value.

Leaders and managers focus carefully on the quality of education. Where they identify weaknesses, leaders act decisively to take actions that lead to improvements. For example, they introduced a new communication module to improve the confidence of social work apprentices. They revised apprenticeships, such as academic professional, where retention and achievement were too low, leading to better outcomes for apprentices.

Leaders have revised and strengthened the management and oversight of apprenticeships effectively. They introduced the apprenticeship hub, which has improved consistency across courses. They introduced new oversight groups who report on the quality of apprenticeships to the highest committees of the university effectively. Consequently, senior leaders and governors understand the strengths and weaknesses of the provision well. They challenge areas that need development and support new initiatives successfully. For example, governors supported the introduction of a new occupational therapy apprenticeship to meet identified need within the sector.

Leaders have been too slow in addressing inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship. They have not ensured that learning builds clearly on what apprentices know and can do, or that the few level 7 apprentices who require functional skills pass them quickly enough. As a result, too many apprentices on this programme have made slow progress or have withdrawn before completing.

Leaders and managers have put in place appropriate systems to monitor the quality of education in subcontractors. Where they identify weaknesses, such as access to timely protected learning hours for police apprentices, leaders quickly recognised the challenges. They worked closely with the subcontractor to implement a new teaching plan which should provide apprentices with timely off-the-job hours to complete written assignments. It is too early to see the impact of these developments.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and the student experience for apprentices on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship programme.
- Ensure that apprentices are able to access and benefit from the wide personal development and enrichment offer that is on offer at the university.
- Ensure that all apprentices with additional learning needs are identified quickly and supported effectively from the start of their programmes.
- Ensure that police apprentices have access to sufficient, well-planned, off-the-job time to complete assignments.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133823
Address	Queen Alexandra Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP11 2JZ
Contact number	01494 522141
Website	www.bucks.ac.uk
Principal, Vice Chancellor	Nick Braisby
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	23 October 2012
Main subcontractors	Thames Valley Police Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust Runway Training

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the commercial and business development director, 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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