

Inspection of University of Northampton

Inspection dates: 28 November to 1 December 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Information about this provider

The University of Northampton (UON) is a public university based in Northampton. Leaders provide degree apprenticeships at levels 5 to 7 as part of the university's wider course offer. Leaders currently offer seven apprenticeship courses in subjects that include nursing, policing, engineering, occupational therapy, advanced clinical practice and management.

Apprentices study either in discrete, apprentice-only groups or in mixed groups alongside students on undergraduate degree courses.

At the time of the inspection, there were 240 apprentices in training. Of these, 160 were aged 24 or over, and the remaining 80 were aged 19 or over.

A large proportion of apprentices study the police constable apprenticeship at level 6, advanced clinical practitioner at level 7, occupational therapist at level 6 or chartered manager at level 6. Other apprentices study the nursing associate at level 5, manufacturing engineer at level 6 or the on-destructive testing engineer at level 6.

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

Leaders provide exceptional standards of teaching resources, which tutors use effectively for specialist training. Nursing associate apprentices develop their practical skills in realistic settings, such as hospital wards, midwifery units and paramedic vehicles. Police constable apprentices benefit from an immersive learning suite where they complete decision logs for investigations such as missing person cases.

Apprentices are rightly satisfied with the training they receive at the university. They find that their training helps them to undertake their challenging roles more competently when they return to their workplace. Apprentices are extremely dedicated to all aspects of their learning.

Leaders work closely with a range of employers and stakeholders. Manufacturing engineering apprentices attend UON's engineering network events, where they meet employers and alumni from different specialist pathways. Police constable apprentices undertake community projects, such as a two-day exercise doing spot checks on vehicles in the locality.

Staff use a good variety of approaches that develop apprentices' confidence and support their future careers, such as health-related simulations, case presentations to consultants and dissertation conferences.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to stay safe. They are aware of the specific risks of their sectors and the plentiful support that is on offer, both at the university and in their workplaces.

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

Leaders have a clear vision for their apprenticeship courses. They offer a small range of courses for local students who aspire to work in health services, policing, engineering and management. Leaders are passionate about the way apprenticeships serve their core purpose of social impact and widening participation. Employers rightly describe the provision as inclusive and 'life-changing' for apprentices from all backgrounds.

Leaders work closely with key employers to ensure that the curriculum meets their skills needs well. The British Institute of Non-Destructive Technologies, the NHS, Northamptonshire Police and other key employers contribute to curriculum design. For example, the policing vision 2025 informs the level 6 police constable curriculum.

Apprentices' off-the-job training is of a good standard. Training is well structured for the different courses. Occupational therapist apprentices attend the university one day every week. They have protected time in the workplace and access to a range of online resources. Police apprentices attend an initial 30-week training period at the university before they embark on a block of 'tutoring' on area patrol. After this,

apprentices undertake independent patrol, followed by interspersed blocks of patrol response and university study.

Leaders and tutors carefully select and organise curriculum content. Advanced clinical practitioner apprentices learn first about clinical reasoning and then move on to diagnostic investigations and how to generate a specific patient care plan. Police constable apprentices focus first on key topics, such as equality and human rights. Then they undertake more complex and difficult topics, such as theory of policing, sudden death and how to deliver a death message.

Tutors are highly qualified, experienced professionals and industry experts in their respective fields. They skilfully use a wide range of teaching approaches to help apprentices acquire and develop new knowledge and skills. In manufacturing engineering, tutors instruct apprentices in how to undertake practical tasks, such as hardness and tensile testing of materials. In nursing, tutors use simulations to help apprentices develop communication and interpersonal skills when they diagnose conditions.

Most tutors use assessment well to check apprentices' understanding. They use reflection and debates, collaborative online tools and individual critical analysis tasks. However, a small minority of tutors do not do this consistently well. Consequently, they do not always know how secure apprentices' grasp of difficult topics is.

In most cases, tutors use retrieval and practice activities well in their teaching. 'Tutor constables' help police constable apprentices recall their learning from initial training, such as how to plan outline interview questions, to further develop their skills while on area patrol. Occupational therapist tutors help apprentices apply their theoretical learning about dementia to different case studies.

Programme leads hold reviews with apprentices and employers. These are largely effective and contribute well to apprentices' progress and development. Employers attend reviews to update on apprentices' progress and jointly agree supportive actions. However, as leaders acknowledge, the quality of reviews is not yet effective across all courses. On a small minority of courses, employers and apprentices do not always understand what progress is being made or know about areas for improvement.

Leaders and tutors have a detailed understanding of the barriers to learning that many apprentices face. They use appropriate strategies, including support from 'ASSIST', the university's additional student support and inclusion services, personal tutor time and reasonable adjustments, such as the allocation of a reader.

Apprentices benefit from helpful feedback that enables them to improve their skills and work standards. University tutors give very clear feedback on written work that leads to improvements, such as a better balance of descriptive and critical analysis or wider use of academic journals. Apprentices receive developmental feedback in

their daily job roles. For example, 'tutor constables' debrief police apprentices after each incident they attend. They identify what went well and what could be better.

Apprentices make good progress from their starting points and develop their knowledge and skills well over time. Nursing associate apprentices have a firm grasp of important clinical skills, such as venepuncture and how to assess and treat wounds. Advanced clinical practitioner apprentices are confident to autonomously assess, diagnose, refer, treat and discharge patients.

Most apprentices complete their courses and almost all successfully achieve their end-of-course assessments. Just over one quarter of apprentices achieve distinction grades. Around half of all completing apprentices secure a first class or upper second classification in their degrees.

Apprentices continue in their high-level roles on completion of their studies. Many progress to undertake top-up degrees or postgraduate study. Employers report very positively about the impact apprentices bring to their workplaces. For example, year 3 police constable apprentices undertake research projects on topics such as misogyny or modern traffic initiatives, which will inform policy in the police service.

Many apprentices learn about a broad range of contexts so they can serve the diverse needs of the wider community, for example how to meet the needs of service users who are blind or have a diagnosis of autism, or how to recognise signs of illness on black skin.

Apprentices are well informed about future study options and career pathways in their specialist sectors. They attend events and job fairs to widen their understanding. Tutors speak to them about top-up degrees, postgraduate courses and progression routes. For example, police constable apprentices know about options such as detective examinations to pursue investigative crime, ways to prepare for promotion to police sergeant, or specialisms such as traffic policing.

In their latest self-assessment report, leaders gave thoughtful consideration to their role in improving the quality of provision. They now have a stronger focus on continuous improvement and have invested in resources to support swift and positive changes, such as implementation of an apprenticeship management system. Leaders now monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) and have a dedicated apprenticeship committee.

Leaders use appropriate processes to review the quality of teaching and learning, such as internal and external quality audits and reviews of apprentice and employer feedback. Leaders work closely with their subcontractor, the chief constable of Northamptonshire Police. They hold monthly reviews to discuss apprentices' progress, quarterly contract meetings and an annual strategic review.

Governors have relevant experience and backgrounds. The board meets half-terminally to review reports through various committees, including the recently established apprenticeship committee. Governors provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge.

For example, they have requested review of the newly formed apprenticeship KPIs to help them further understand any issues as these arise.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure all tutors use effective strategies to check and monitor apprentices' understanding.
- Continue to improve the effectiveness of progress reviews across all courses.
- Continue to develop the ways in which leaders have careful oversight of provision and further strengthen quality improvement approaches.

Provider details

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Website	www.northampton.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Anne-Marie Kilday
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Northamptonshire Police

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the apprenticeship manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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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