

# Inspection of Cranfield University

Inspection dates: 23 to 26 January 2024

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

## Information about this provider

Cranfield University secured funding to teach apprenticeships in September 2017. Since then, leaders have focused on providing apprenticeship programmes that meet the needs of the local, regional and national employers in the engineering, digital, aviation and banking industries.

The university has four schools, School of Management, School of Aerospace, Transport & Manufacturing, School of Water, Energy & Environment and Cranfield Defence & Security, on the site at Cranfield in Bedfordshire. The level 6 provision is taught in Milton Keynes by MK:U, a subsidiary wholly controlled by Cranfield University. This provision is managed as an additional school within the structure. The curriculum is composed of 12 level 7 programmes and four level 6 apprenticeship standards. Most apprentices are studying the senior leader programme at level 7 and the digital and technology solutions professional programme at level 6.

There were 920 apprentices on level 7 programmes and 360 on level 6 programmes. Fifty-four apprentices were on a break in learning. There were 74 apprentices who had disclosed special educational needs. A small proportion of apprentices studying at the Milton Keynes site were under the age of 19. Eighty-six apprentices were studying English and/or mathematics functional skills.

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

Apprentices value the positive learning environment that they experience at the university. They benefit from high-quality teaching, both face to face and online. Teaching staff are highly experienced in the industries in which they teach. They use their experience confidently to provide apprentices with a sound knowledge of the industries in which they work. As a result, apprentices gain substantial new knowledge and skills that help them to excel in their job roles and prepare effectively for promoted posts at work. Apprentices state that they are enthused and inspired to learn.

Most apprentices find their assignments interesting and rewarding. Apprentices enjoy developing their creative thinking skills, problem-solving and the application of academic models and theories. They use these expertly to consider new approaches in their work and learn from their peers, who come from diverse industries and have a wealth of experiences to share with the group. As a result, apprentices gain confidence in their work and improve their self-esteem.

Apprentices who have not been in education for some time find the university environment friendly and stimulating. Apprentices appreciate the support they have received to adapt to learning again. Many enjoy online learning, as they can fit their studies around working and family life. A small proportion of apprentices, particularly at level 6, would prefer to have more face-to-face teaching.

Apprentices feel that staff want them to succeed and encourage them to improve their work and achieve high standards of performance. A small proportion of apprentices find independent working and self-study challenging. Some have found that managing a full-time job alongside studying requires careful consideration of how they manage their time.

Apprentices feel safe online and in their workplaces. They have a broad understanding of how to protect themselves and others from radicalisation and extremist behaviours in their job roles, such as the dangers of drones at airports.

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

Leaders and managers have put in place a well-considered and ambitious curriculum that is aligned closely to the needs of local, regional and national employers in the niche sectors in which the university works. In level 6 digital and technology solutions, apprentices gain skills that enable them to support businesses to remain competitive in a fast-moving global world, and level 7 bioinformatics scientist apprentices can understand and use biological data in relation to drugs development and plant genetics.

Leaders have fostered strong and effective working relationships with employers and sector lead organisations. Leaders identify sector-specific knowledge and skills and embed these successfully into the curriculum. As a result, they ensure that the curriculum is current and reflects modern working practices. In level 7 senior investment and commercial banking professional, leaders work with a leading bank to ensure that the curriculum meets specific skills, such as specialist programming for retail bankers to operate online banking systems. In level 7 aviation, risk and management, leaders consult with airlines on how to upskill staff and support their career progression.

Apprentices develop substantial new knowledge and skills during their apprenticeship programmes. Managers ensure that modules are logically sequenced so that apprentices build on the skills they have at the start of the course. In the level 6 chartered manager apprenticeship, apprentices learn about the digital world and how to manage finance before moving on to professional application of these skills using critical thinking and delivering presentations. In level 7 senior investment and commercial banking, apprentices learn about neurodiversity and understand how to use this knowledge in designing online banking services.

Highly experienced and well-qualified staff provide apprentices with up-to-date and relevant training, both online and face to face. Visiting lecturers and experts provide apprentices with a detailed and broad understanding of the industry. Leaders have invested in high-quality teaching resources. Teaching staff use the excellent facilities and available technology well to provide apprentices with a good understanding of the resources that they will experience in the workplace. For example, in level 7 sustainability business specialist, apprentices benefit from multiple recording studios, including green screens that are equipped with the latest broadcasting facilities, and technology rooms.

Leaders have a strong commitment to continuous professional development. Staff benefit from frequent appraisals in which they identify their own development needs alongside mandatory training for topics such as safeguarding and equality and diversity. Leaders have high expectations of teaching staff to improve their classroom practice. Teaching staff are required to have a teaching qualification, and visiting lecturers can complete modules of an academic practice qualification. As a result, apprentices benefit from high-quality teaching.

Teaching staff support apprentices proficiently to link their new knowledge to their practice in the workplace. They use problem-based learning and realistic scenarios to prompt discussions and direct projects. As a result, apprentices expertly use their new knowledge and skills to enhance their own job roles. Level 6 chartered manager apprentices, for example, understand better how to implement leading change using a Kubler-Ross change curve model.

Teaching staff use real work experiences, video clips, group discussions and group projects effectively to reinforce learning. They provide clear explanations and encourage apprentices to use professional language and vocabulary confidently in discussions and in their work. Apprentices in level 6 digital and technology solutions

professional apprenticeship understand terms such as Big-O notation. Staff break learning down into manageable steps so that apprentices can grasp new concepts swiftly. Teaching staff encourage apprentices to reflect on their practice. They use open and probing questioning frequently to check apprentices' understanding of new knowledge and skills before they progress to the next topic. Apprentices are confident to ask questions and clarify their ideas. As a result, apprentices can recall and apply their learning to new situations in their job roles. They become valuable employees within the workplace, and many gain promoted posts.

Apprenticeship tutors and coaches work closely with employers to support apprentices. They use tripartite reviews effectively to monitor apprentices' progress. Consequently, apprentices, employers and tutors have a good understanding of apprentices' progress and what they need to do to improve. The work that apprentices complete at university is aligned well to their job role.

Staff provide highly effective support for apprentices who disclose a learning need. These apprentices frequently have a learning support plan which staff use to ensure that apprentices make good progress. Staff ensure that apprentices with dyslexia are supported, offering proofreading and guidance to improve their grammar. Where appropriate, staff provide apprentices with autism with appropriate software that assists them to organise their ideas and help with decision-making and problem-solving.

Governors have an in-depth understanding of the provision. They are committed to and understand how apprenticeships fit within the ethos of the university curriculum, reflecting proximity to the industry and a problem-based approach to training. Governors have good oversight of the provision and ensure that the same academic rigour and scrutiny apply to apprenticeships as to other university courses. Governors ensure that leaders and managers meet their statutory duties for safeguarding and equality and diversity.

Leaders and governors have a strong commitment to secure quality improvement. They analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the provision frequently and secure continuous improvement in apprentices' learning experiences. Leaders do not, however, routinely gather sufficiently detailed data to provide them with an understanding of why specific weaknesses occur. They do not know why a high proportion of apprentices leave their courses early or do not complete their apprenticeship within the planned timescales. As a result, leaders do not rapidly rectify these weaknesses.

Teaching staff provide constructive and detailed feedback to apprentices on their work. In a minority of apprenticeships at level 6, coaches do not provide sufficient helpful feedback or inform apprentices of what they need to do to improve their work. Leaders do not routinely ensure that teaching staff have a consistent approach to providing feedback. As a result, apprentices do not always understand why they have received the feedback given. Apprentices produce work of a high standard, demonstrating high levels of research and analytical

skills. As a result, apprentices have won national awards and published work on specialist science publications.

Apprentices demonstrate high levels of professional behaviour. They are highly motivated and take pride in their work. Those working in the aviation industry become culturally and politically aware and develop strong diplomatic skills. Apprentices on level 7 digital banking programmes speak confidently about financial inclusion in providing customers with products and services that meet their needs in relation to gender, age and location.

The quality of careers advice and guidance that staff provide for apprentices is too variable. Those apprentices who are under 19 years of age and those who are on short-term contracts do not receive sufficient high-quality careers advice and guidance to ensure that they understand the range of careers available to them when they complete their apprenticeship. Although level 7 apprentices are aware of online careers resources that are available to them, too few use these to extend their knowledge of career opportunities.

Leaders and managers do not give sufficient priority to supporting the development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills. They do not ensure that apprentices provide evidence of prior achievement in these subjects swiftly enough at the beginning of the apprenticeship programme. As a result, staff do not know which apprentices require teaching to achieve their qualifications. Where apprentices do need to study for these qualifications, leaders do not provide sufficient relevant teaching to ensure that apprentices develop the skills that they require. In the level 6 digital and technology solution professional apprenticeship, apprentices improve their presentation and communication skills through their apprenticeship activities.

Too few apprentices remain on their apprenticeship or achieve their qualification within the planned timescales. Those apprentices who do remain on programme make good progress and are prepared well for their final assessments. As a result, most achieve their apprenticeship, and a high proportion achieve distinction grades.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Provide apprentices with appropriate teaching in English and mathematics aligned to their prior achievements so that they make good progress towards achieving their qualification.
- Provide relevant careers advice and guidance for apprentices, including for those apprentices under the age of 19 or on short-term contracts, so that they have a good understanding of the opportunities available to them when they complete their apprenticeship.

- Analyse data robustly to identify specific weaknesses in the provision, such as low retention, so that leaders have a good understanding of why weaknesses occur and rectify them.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133848
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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Professor Karen Holford
<b>Provider type</b>	FE in HE
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## 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

Lynda Brown, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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