

Inspection of York St John University

Inspection dates: 12 to 15 March 2024

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

York St John University is a higher education institution based in York. It provides training for apprentices across the country, but predominantly in Yorkshire, Humberside, and London.

At the time of the inspection, there were 414 apprentices on eight apprenticeship standards. Most apprentices were on programmes at levels 6 and 7, including data scientist, project manager, chartered manager, police constable and senior leader. A smaller proportion were on level 6 programmes in healthcare and laboratory science and level 3 laboratory technician.

The university works with two subcontractors to provide courses leading to functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics and a specialist project management qualification, as part of the level 6 project manager degree apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices proudly represent the university's values of promoting fairness and equality of opportunity, and challenging prejudice. They contribute to a vibrant and inclusive culture where individuality is respected and bullying and harassment are never tolerated. As a result, apprentices feel safe and protected in training and at work.

Apprentices collaborate enthusiastically in the professional learning environments created by lecturers and tutors. Project manager apprentices use online tools to give live, constructive feedback to their peers during group presentations. Chartered manager apprentices compete in groups to demonstrate their understanding of key concepts and receive praise from their peers when they are successful. Apprentices enjoy their training and are motivated to achieve.

Apprentices rapidly improve their confidence and resilience through the training that they receive. Senior leader apprentices develop skills in public speaking and access additional sessions on topics such as 'learning from failure' and 'developing authentic self'. Consequently, apprentices are more able to take on greater responsibility at work, including large-scale projects and presenting at conferences and professional events.

Apprentices benefit from highly individualised support to manage their personal health and well-being. They meet frequently with a team of work-based learning tutors, who take the time to get to know apprentices and to understand the barriers that apprentices may face in their training. Apprentices can access specialist counselling, both in-person and online, in matters such as mental and financial health. As a result, apprentices feel well supported, and more able to navigate the demands of their training alongside work.

Most apprentices attend their sessions well and arrive punctually, due to the high expectations of their lecturers and tutors. Staff work with employers to reinforce these expectations, so that apprentices' attendance and engagement in training, both on- and off-the-job, are prioritised. However, the attendance of a small number of apprentices on the data scientist and healthcare scientist programmes is lower than that of their peers.

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

Leaders have a clear vision to provide transformative training opportunities to the communities that they serve. They have designed a range of ambitious apprenticeship pathways to enable apprentices, many of whom have not had the opportunity to access higher education previously, to engage in degree-level study and to realise their aspirations. Leaders engage with employers to inform the design of pathways, including working with them to adapt content and assessment methods. This ensures that training is accessible to apprentices, while securing successfully the skills that employers need.

Leaders plan and sequence the curriculum logically so that apprentices develop new knowledge and skills progressively over time. Project management apprentices first learn the theoretical principles of project management before applying these principles to practical concepts, such as responsible business practice. Data scientist apprentices develop their knowledge of mathematical models and statistical analysis in the first year of study before revisiting these concepts through practical application in the second and third years of the programme.

Lecturers and tutors are highly qualified in their disciplines. They use their expertise to provide accurate and contemporary insights into the sectors in which apprentices work. For example, chartered manager and project manager lecturers use current events and case studies as a platform for discussion about the social implications of responsible business models.

Lecturers use varied teaching strategies to embed key concepts and to deepen apprentices' understanding of what they have learned. For example, lecturers in data science represent code in graphical formats to develop apprentices' understanding of coding. They use increasingly complex practical tasks for apprentices to apply their learning to workplace scenarios, such as using object-oriented coding and automated data capture. They encourage apprentices to use technical language accurately when completing these tasks, and, as a result, apprentices demonstrate confidently and fluently the skills that are valued highly by employers.

Most lecturers use assessment effectively to check what apprentices know and can do. Lecturers on police constable programmes use questioning to test apprentices' analysis of 'Hanoi' burglaries. They ask probing questions to ensure that apprentices' responses are based on evidence and can withstand challenge. Apprentices complete frequent assignments, examinations and presentations to demonstrate the progressive development of their knowledge and skills over time. However, in a few instances, assignment briefs set by lecturers are too vague, which results in a few apprentices not being clear about the work that they are required to complete.

Most lecturers and tutors give helpful feedback which apprentices use to make timely improvements to their work. For example, data scientist lecturers help apprentices to simplify and use functional formats when coding. However, in a few instances apprentices receive feedback that is not specific enough to inform targeted improvement.

Tutors support apprentices with additional learning needs to manage well the demands of degree-level study. Lecturers and tutors use clear and relevant learning plans to target support for these apprentices and ensure that appropriate access arrangements are in place. As a result, apprentices with additional learning needs make good progress, in line with their peers.

Leaders ensure that the small number of apprentices who require functional English and mathematics qualifications receive effective tuition and support. Apprentices access one-to-one support and review their progress frequently with their tutors. As

a result, apprentices make good progress and are supported well to achieve their qualifications in a timely way.

Staff ensure that apprentices have a well-developed understanding of fundamental British values in the context of their workplace roles. For example, senior leader and data scientist apprentices explore the rule of law in relation to the vulnerability of data and how this can be exploited, and the implications of artificial intelligence on the rules that govern data protection.

Leaders and staff provide information to help apprentices identify the risks that they may encounter in their personal lives and when at work. For example, apprentices receive helpful newsletters featuring topics such as bullying and harassment in the workplace. However, a few apprentices do not have a sufficiently well-developed understanding of the risks that they may encounter in their local communities or in the context of their job roles.

Leaders and staff provide opportunities for apprentices to develop a sense of social responsibility. Apprentices undertake outreach work through their employer to share the benefits of apprenticeship pathways. A few apprentices take part in research projects to contribute to university-wide projects on themes including social justice and ethical leadership. They are invited to participate in themed weeks to actively challenge racism and sexism, and to counter sexual violence. However, leaders rightly recognise that too few apprentices are aware of the extent of the offer that is available to them.

Apprentices benefit from effective careers advice and guidance to help them understand the opportunities available to them on completion of their programmes. They attend careers fairs and hear from industry-specific guest speakers. They receive complimentary membership to professional bodies to network with fellow professionals and to explore future employment opportunities.

Leaders and managers have good oversight of the quality of their provision, including that of subcontractors. They have been astute in understanding historic issues with underperformance and, on a few programmes, instances of dissatisfaction among apprentices and employers. They have been agile in responding to these concerns through implementing rapid improvement plans, a renewed approach to tripartite reviews and more effective monitoring of apprentices' progress. Leaders use data intelligently to focus quality assurance activities and devise quality improvement plans that reflect their ambitious standards. As a result, a higher proportion of apprentices now remain on their programmes and achieve well, with many securing merits and distinctions.

Governors are highly experienced and bring significant knowledge to their roles. They understand clearly the vision for the university's apprenticeship provision and are acutely aware of the strengths and areas for improvement. They provide effective support and challenge to ensure that leaders can drive and sustain continued improvement.

Leaders have cultivated an environment where staff are empowered to develop their expertise. Lecturers and tutors have access to a broad training offer, including sessions to develop their craft of teaching and one-to-one coaching and mentoring. Staff are supported well to keep their knowledge and skills current through participation in academic research and membership of professional bodies.

Leaders and managers provide effective support for the well-being of their staff. They take time to understand the issues that staff experience in relation to workload and use the information that they gather to devise sensible actions to help improve the efficiency of working practices. As a result, staff are proud to be part of an organisation that protects and values the well-being of its workforce.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Maintain the strong focus on ensuring that apprentices remain on their programmes and achieve well.
- Ensure that apprentices have a well-developed understanding of the risks that they may face in their local communities and in the context of their job roles.
- Encourage apprentices to participate in the extensive offer that is available to support their personal development.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133914
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Contact number	01904 624624
Website	https://www.yorks.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Robert Mortimer
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	20/20 Business Insight Limited Runway Apprenticeships Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of apprenticeships, 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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