

Inspection of Harper Adams University

Inspection dates: 30 April to 3 May 2024

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
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| 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

Harper Adams University is based in Newport, Shropshire. The university provides specialist higher education in support of the agricultural, agricultural engineering, food science and technology, environmental science, veterinary science and land-based sectors. At the time of the inspection, there were 205 apprentices, of which 128 were on the level 6 chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship, 35 were on the level 5 veterinary technician (livestock) apprenticeship, 28 were on the level 6 food industry technical professional (integrated degree) apprenticeship, 12 were on the level 6 food and drink advanced engineer (integrated degree) apprenticeship and two were on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship. The university does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices enjoy their learning at the university and display consistently positive behaviours and attitudes towards their learning. They look forward to their block-release teaching time on campus, and as a result, their attendance and punctuality are consistently high, despite the work pressures of their job roles.

Apprentices consistently demonstrate high levels of respect towards their peers and university staff and in the workplace. They work in challenging environments such as senior leadership roles and consistently uphold the high standards of professionalism expected of them.

Leaders and tutors have developed curriculums that develop apprentices' confidence and independence and prepare them for progressing in both their careers and personal lives. For example, apprentices on the level 6 chartered surveyor degree apprenticeship develop the confidence to present at conferences and breakfast meetings. As a result, apprentices feel well prepared for the challenges they face.

Apprentices benefit from the support of the provider's well-being team to look after their physical and mental health. They have access to appointments and a suite of online resources to promote their well-being. As a result, apprentices understand the importance of looking after their physical and mental health.

Most apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout their apprenticeship. Apprentices on the level 6 food industry technical professional apprenticeship develop an in-depth understanding of microbiology and the identification of E.coli in food. Most apprentices quickly have a positive impact in the workplace and, in some instances, take on additional responsibilities as they progress through their apprenticeship.

Apprentices feel safe both in the university and when at work. They find tutors approachable and feel safe on campus. Apprentices are aware of who to contact in the event of any concerns and feel confident that these would be dealt with effectively.

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

Leaders and managers demonstrate a clear rationale for the curriculums they have chosen to offer. They have focused on areas of national skills shortages which are within the provider's areas of expertise, such as food manufacturing and chartered surveying. They have worked closely with industry partners and stakeholders to develop curriculums which meet their needs. For example, following industry demand, the university's vet school participated in the development of the level 5 veterinary technician (livestock) apprenticeship standard and has been the first to offer it to apprentices and employers.

Leaders have ensured that they plan their curriculums in a well-considered order to support apprentices to develop and build on their knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. However, in a small minority of cases, where apprentices have started their courses later and have joined existing groups, they have not benefited from as effective sequencing of their learning. Leaders have recognised this and, prior to inspection, had amended their enrolment processes to prevent further instances of this happening in the future.

In the majority of cases, leaders and managers have a clear oversight of the quality of education apprentices receive. They have a variety of quality monitoring mechanisms such as peer observations, employer engagements and student voice. They use these effectively to review and make changes as necessary. For example, in both the chartered surveyor and food industry technical professional apprenticeships, leaders have restructured the balance of modules across each academic year following feedback from apprentices and employers. This ensures apprentices can balance their increasing levels of responsibilities at work with their studies later in their apprenticeship.

Apprentices complete an assessment of their existing skills prior to starting their apprenticeship. In most cases, tutors use this information to plan apprentices learning. However, in a few cases in the level 5 veterinary technician apprenticeship, the results of these assessments are not used well enough to identify areas of the curriculum where apprentices have existing knowledge or qualifications. As a result, a few apprentices repeat learning that they already know.

Tutors ensure that the feedback they provide to apprentices is sufficiently developmental and identifies areas where they have done well and those they need to improve. Feedback often includes support for spelling, grammar and, where necessary, academic writing. As a result, the quality of apprentices' work improves over time.

Tutors effectively use a range of strategies to support apprentices in retaining their learning in their long-term memory and assess how well they have retained previous learning. For example, on the level 6 food industry technical professional apprenticeship, tutors use frequent recaps and periodic checks on retention and recall of prior learning to ensure apprentices' knowledge is secure before moving on to new topics. As a result, apprentices are able to recall previous learning and apply it to further topics they study.

In most cases, employers participate in apprentices' progress reviews. They support apprentices with development opportunities in the workplace and feel well informed about their progress. However, in some reviews, the targets tutors set focus too narrowly on keeping learners on track and do not always set challenging targets to encourage them to achieve their best.

In most cases, tutors routinely develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills within the context of their learning. For example, in level 6 chartered surveyor apprenticeship, apprentices develop their skills in compound interest, gross margins

and energy efficiency. However, in level 5 veterinary technician, the progress towards completing functional skills qualifications for the very few apprentices who need to complete them has been slow, and risks preventing the apprentices from entering end-point assessment.

Leaders and managers provide regular opportunities for tutors to engage in professional development of both their teaching and in their areas of vocational expertise. For example, chartered surveyor tutors undertake agricultural tenancies to further develop their vocational knowledge. Leaders also ensure any vocational professionals new to teaching undertake an appropriate teaching qualification. As a result, tutors use effective teaching strategies and incorporate up-to-date sector knowledge and skills so that apprentices learn the skills they need.

Apprentices have access to high-quality careers education, information, advice and guidance to support them in making decisions about their next steps. Information and guidance are available through the university careers team and in apprenticeships through visiting speakers, mini careers fairs and the integration of initial careers advice in foundational modules across all apprenticeship programmes. However, not all apprentices are aware of the full suite of resources available to them, as these services are not routinely promoted to them throughout their learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that the starting points of apprentices on the level 5 veterinary technician apprenticeship are used to plan their learning effectively.
- Ensure that the minority of apprentices who require functional skills qualifications make rapid progress from the beginning of their apprenticeship.
- Ensure all apprentices receive sufficient careers advice so that they are aware of their potential next steps.
- Ensure that targets set for all apprentices are sufficiently challenging to encourage apprentices to achieve their best.

Provider details

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| Unique reference number | 133891 |
| Address | Harper Adams University Newport Shropshire TF10 8NB |
| Contact number | 01952820280 |
| Website | www.harper-adams.ac.uk |
| Vice-Chancellor and CEO | Professor Ken Sloan |
| Provider type | Higher education institution |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Main subcontractors | None |

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the head of educational development and quality enhancement, 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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|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Stuart Collett, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Rachel Clark | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Patricia Rogers | Ofsted Inspector |
| Karen Bill | Ofsted Inspector |
| Jackie Shopland-Reed | Ofsted Inspector |

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