

# Inspection of University of Sunderland

Inspection dates: 11 to 14 June 2024

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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| The quality of education                     | <b>Good</b>        |
| Behaviour and attitudes                      | <b>Good</b>        |
| Personal development                         | <b>Outstanding</b> |
| Leadership and management                    | <b>Good</b>        |
| Apprenticeships                              | <b>Good</b>        |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good               |

## Information about this provider

The University of Sunderland provides training for apprentices predominantly in the city of Sunderland and the surrounding area. At the time of the inspection, there were 852 apprentices on 19 standards. Most apprentices were on programmes at levels 6 and 7, including 345 on the level 6 registered nurse degree apprenticeship, 116 on the level 6 social worker integrated degree apprenticeship, 99 on the level 7 senior leader apprenticeship and 63 on the manufacturing engineer degree apprenticeship. In addition, smaller numbers of apprentices were on senior journalist, occupational therapist, public health practitioner, advanced clinical practitioner and electrical engineer programmes. A few apprentices were on programmes at levels 3 and 4, including level 4 healthcare science associate, level 3 team leader and level 3 business administrator. Most apprentices were aged 19 and over.

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

Apprentices rapidly develop their knowledge and become highly skilled. Tutors ensure that planned on- and off-the-job training is blended seamlessly so that apprentices routinely reflect on the development of their knowledge, skills and behaviours. Level 6 manufacturing engineer apprentices use their sound technical knowledge to question suppliers when purchasing new or replacement parts. Level 6 registered nurse apprentices build their capacity to manage highly emotive incidents at work through routine post-incident reflection. As a result of their training, a high proportion of apprentices secure permanent employment with their current employer and many gain promotions during their programmes.

Apprentices invest in their training and are motivated to achieve. They make use of the university's extensive facilities to undertake research and wider reading to consolidate and deepen their knowledge. Many take on additional opportunities to share their knowledge and expertise for the benefit of the sectors in which they work by, for example, presenting at national conferences and professional networking events. Consequently, apprentices are very well prepared for success in their current and future job roles and are proud of the progress that they make.

Apprentices value deeply the concept of community and embrace opportunities to take collective action to improve the lives of others. They identify opportunities to improve services in their local communities and take action through volunteering and community projects. Staff champion the contributions that apprentices make to their communities and recognise their talents and achievements with university awards, including the annual community heroes award.

Apprentices feel safe in training and at work, due to the expertise and care of staff. Tutors and mentors teach apprentices about the risks inherent in the sectors in which they work to enable them to protect themselves and others. For example, level 6 youth worker apprentices are taught about knife crime, child exploitation and the risks associated with grooming early in their programme. Apprentices on healthcare and social work programmes implement their employers' safeguarding procedures when working alone in the community and use their training to defuse conflict in the challenging situations that they may encounter.

Most tutors ensure that apprentices develop and practise the professional standards that employers value highly. Apprentices arrive at sessions on time and ready to learn, and they contribute positively in activities to support their own learning and that of their peers. However, on a few programmes, such as level 7 senior leader and level 7 senior journalist, expectations of apprentices' participation in sessions taught online are less clear. Too often, a few apprentices turn their cameras off and are not encouraged to participate fully in the activities set for them by their tutors.

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

Leaders, tutors and mentors are proud advocates of lifelong learning. They have developed a range of apprenticeship pathways to enable apprentices, many of whom have not participated in higher-level study previously, to train and progress into the sectors in which they aspire to work. They collaborate with employers and civic stakeholders to align their curriculum precisely with local and regional skills needs. For example, leaders and managers work with local NHS trusts and the local council to improve the recruitment of nurses and social workers. As a result, they are providing transformative opportunities to develop individuals, local services and the wider regional economy.

Tutors sequence programmes logically and revisit content frequently to build and deepen apprentices' understanding. Level 6 youth worker apprentices first study the values and principles of community work before exploring the impact of such work in a modern-day context. Tutors on healthcare apprenticeships revisit the core knowledge that underpins their clinical practice in the workplace as they learn new content, such as health promotion, culture in practice and care planning.

Tutors use a range of effective teaching strategies to help apprentices to develop and refine their skills, including group projects, case studies and role play. Apprentices on clinical programmes undertake consultation and diagnosis with members of the public, using the university's simulated industry-standard health facilities, and reflect on the success of their approach. As a result, they are more able to prepare and implement treatment plans in line with their employers' policies and procedures.

Tutors support apprentices well to develop their occupational mathematical and English skills. Level 6 registered nurse apprentices calculate the ratios of medication required for treatment in the context of safe handling guidelines. Apprentices develop their evaluative writing skills and are supported to review critically the latest research that they encounter in their work. The few apprentices who require functional skills qualifications benefit from effective tuition to help them achieve their qualifications, with many passing their examinations at the first attempt.

Most tutors use assessment well to check what apprentices know and can do, and provide helpful feedback which apprentices use to improve their work. They plan assessments to reflect the requirements of the sectors in which apprentices work, including practical projects, observed interviews and professional discussions, and use examinations to test apprentices' recall and application of legislation. However, on a few programmes, such as level 7 senior journalist and level 6 manufacturing engineer, tutors do not routinely check what apprentices have learned before moving on to teach new content. In these instances, tutors do not give feedback or plan additional teaching that helps apprentices to improve.

Managers and tutors use initial assessment well to identify apprentices' starting points and to provide support for those with additional learning needs. They work

closely with the university's disability services to make learning resources accessible and inclusive. For example, tutors provide links to alternative revision tools and include captions in audio and visual resources for apprentices who are hearing impaired. Tutors and mentors assess the effectiveness of this support in progress review meetings to ensure that strategies have a beneficial impact on apprentices' progress both in training and at work.

Managers and tutors work in close collaboration with work-based mentors and employers to understand the progress that apprentices make and to plan future training. Work-based mentors have a very clear understanding of their role, the curriculum and how apprentices will be assessed. They use the highly effective review process to ensure that apprentices have opportunities in the workplace to develop their professional competencies successfully.

Tutors provide highly effective support to enable apprentices to balance the demands of their job roles alongside higher-level study. Staff educate apprentices about the positive impact of self-care on mental and physical well-being and equip them with the knowledge to make more informed lifestyle choices. Apprentices have access to a wide range of services, including talking therapies and a 24-hour crisis service to access professional help and support when they need it.

Tutors provide apprentices with helpful careers advice and guidance to help them understand the options available to them now and in the future. They facilitate careers sessions with talks from external speakers and develop the knowledge and skills that apprentices need for more senior roles. For example, level 7 senior journalist apprentices learn about editorial leadership to prepare them for opportunities beyond their current roles. Apprentices on clinical programmes benefit from a rotation of placements to expose them to the wide variety of patients and settings that they may encounter in the future.

Leaders, managers and tutors have established a culture in which the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion are proudly promoted. Tutors weave fundamental British values expertly through the curriculum and equip apprentices with knowledge and traits to model respect and tolerance, and to safeguard protected characteristics. For example, level 6 youth worker apprentices explore the ethical considerations of freedom of speech and how they can empower the self-expression of younger generations.

Leaders and governors have invested significantly in their apprenticeship provision to ensure it delivers a highly skilled and competent workforce that meets employer needs. The formation of a new leadership team has provided clearer lines of accountability, and new quality assurance arrangements are sufficiently rigorous to identify earlier the issues that may affect the quality of provision. As a result, apprentice and employer satisfaction is high and apprentices achieve well, with many achieving high grades. However, apprentices on a small number of programmes and their employers remain frustrated by the impact of weak provision experienced in the early stages of the apprenticeship. Leaders have taken rapid

action to ensure that these apprentices continue to be well supported and benefit from provision that reflects the high standards experienced by most.

Teaching staff are well qualified and benefit from an extensive offer to develop their teaching skills and industry expertise. Staff are active participants in university-wide research projects on matters such as inclusion and learner retention, and they update their practical skills through their membership of professional bodies and participation in industry-led training. They share their findings with colleagues at internal conferences and national professional networks for the benefit of the higher education sector.

Leaders and managers care deeply about the well-being of their staff and are alert to the pressures placed upon them. Staff have access to an extensive range of diversity and equality networks, where staff can meet and access support from others with similar lived experience. As a result, staff enjoy their roles and are invested in the university's mission to transform lives through learning.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- Ensure that all apprentices receive helpful and specific feedback to enable them to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Establish high expectations for apprentices' participation in teaching sessions, including those taking place online.
- Implement actions to further strengthen leaders' oversight of the quality of teaching, training and assessment.

## Provider details

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|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>      | 133881  |
| <b>Address</b>                      | 4th Floor, Edinburgh Building<br>City Campus, Chester Road<br>Sunderland<br>SR1 3SD |
| <b>Contact number</b>               | 0191 5152000  |
| <b>Website</b>                      | <a href="http://www.sunderland.ac.uk">www.sunderland.ac.uk</a>                      |
| <b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b> | Sir David Bell  |
| <b>Provider type</b>                | Higher education institution  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>  | 20 to 22 March 2019   |
| <b>Main subcontractors</b>          | None  |

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the academic director 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

|                               |                         |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Alison Dennis, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Mark Keen                     | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Sarah Lonsdale                | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Chloe Rendall                 | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Sarah Seaman                  | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Mary Osmaston                 | Ofsted Inspector        |

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