Inspection of University of Sheffield

Inspection dates:	12 to 15 November 2024

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	Good

Information about this provider

The University of Sheffield started offering apprenticeships in 2013. It has recently reduced the range of apprenticeships on offer and currently focuses on qualifications in engineering and healthcare, which are areas of particular expertise at the university. Engineering apprentices attend lessons at the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre Training Centre (AMRC-TC) in Rotherham. Healthcare apprentices attend lessons in Sheffield. Apprentices include school leavers and adults. The university works with two subcontractors to support fewer than five apprentices to complete work that they started with a different provider.

At the time of the inspection, 1,120 apprentices were enrolled. There were 270 level 3 engineering technicians, 173 level 5 nursing associates, 120 level 3 machining technicians, 74 level 3 mechatronics maintenance technicians, 71 level 6 manufacturing engineers (degree), 62 level 6 speech and language therapists, 60 level 7 advanced clinical practitioners, 56 level 3 metal fabricators, 49 level 6 product design and development engineers (degree), 37 level 3 engineering fitters, 33 level 4 engineering manufacturing technicians and smaller numbers of apprentices across a range of other engineering and healthcare subjects.

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

Apprentices are very positive about their experiences. They are proud of the skills and knowledge that they acquire and of the artefacts that they design and make. They enjoy being part of both the university and their company's workforce. They enjoy their studies and look forward to learning new topics. They value the support that they receive from university staff when they encounter academic and personal challenges.

Apprentices benefit from the good relationships that university staff have with their employers. In engineering, these strong links ensure that employers provide good opportunities for apprentices to practise at work the things that they learn at the university. Healthcare apprentices benefit from opportunities to learn in a wide range of different work placements, outside of their normal job roles.

Apprentices develop their knowledge and skills well, and this supports them in their continued employment. They quickly become valued employees.

Apprentices benefit from encounters with other apprentices who are much further along in their studies. For example, final-year apprentice registered nurses write a letter to new apprentices about their experiences. This helps new apprentices to feel confident when tackling the challenges of the course.

Apprentices feel safe. They do not experience any bullying, harassment or inappropriate conduct from other apprentices. They are fully aware of the university's safeguarding arrangements and are confident that any concerns they raise will be dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff.

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

Leaders and managers consult carefully with employers to ensure that course content matches their specific needs. For example, the level 3 metal fabricator apprenticeship includes both traditional welding skills and the precision skills needed in the nuclear power industry. In many cases, this means that curriculums extend beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship standard.

In most cases, teachers organise topics well, enabling apprentices to progressively build their knowledge and skills. However, the relatively small number of apprentice registered nurses attend lessons alongside non-apprentices who follow a slightly different curriculum. In these lessons, teachers occasionally refer to topics that apprentices have not yet studied, and this confuses them.

Most teachers work closely with the university's learning support team to adapt teaching to meet the needs of learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide additional one-to-one support and extra study materials, and they make physical adaptations to apprentices' workstations.

However, a few apprentices experience delays in learning support planning that affects their progress in the early stages of their courses.

Teachers pitch their lessons at an appropriate level and use a range of suitable methods, materials and activities to help apprentices to understand key concepts. They make use of a wide range of excellent equipment that helps apprentices to develop their skills. Teachers frequently revisit topics and make effective use of practice activities so that apprentices can master key skills and knowledge. For example, registered nurse apprentices repeatedly practise clinical skills with simulation sessions that target the precise techniques that they will encounter at work, such as catheterisation on a renal ward.

Teachers make good use of a range of techniques to check apprentices' understanding of topics. If apprentices do not understand a theme, teachers recap, rephrase or provide additional contextualised examples. However, in a very few cases, engineering apprentices attend lessons where some apprentices are present in the classroom and others are online. In these lessons, tutors do not consistently check the understanding of the apprentices who participate remotely.

Apprentices develop the skills and knowledge that they need to be successful in employment. A high proportion of apprentices achieve their qualifications on almost all courses. In the small number of graded apprenticeships, a substantial proportion of apprentices gain merit or distinction grades.

Staff set high expectations for behaviour and act as professional role models. At AMRC-TC, staff wear their uniforms with pride and continually remind apprentices that they are professional employees. They relate professional behaviour to the hazardous nature of the workplace and the need to stay safe. Teachers of nursing associates and registered nurses draw apprentices' attention to the Nursing and Midwifery Council's code of conduct and insist on strict adherence to it.

Staff provide apprentices with suitable careers guidance. Teachers frequently talk to apprentices about their own careers, and apprentices often benefit from talks from external speakers. Healthcare apprentices participate in work placements that allow them to experience different specialisms. Apprentices can access the university's careers service, but a few apprentices are not aware of this.

The recently created apprenticeship hub provides highly effective oversight of apprenticeship courses. Managers in the hub have established rigorous quality assurance processes that they use to monitor teaching, learning and assessment. Managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of each course. They have systems to identify individual apprentices who are at risk of falling behind or withdrawing and they intervene swiftly to provide support.

Leaders make suitable arrangements for governance. The university has a comprehensive matrix of reporting committees. These committees receive useful information that enables members to question managers about the suitability and

effectiveness of apprenticeships. Governance has contributed to improvements in the small number of underperforming courses.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Revise the sequence of teaching for apprentice registered nurses so that teachers do not refer to topics that apprentices have not studied.
- Identify and implement actions to improve achievement on the very small number of apprenticeships where it is low.
- Provide support plans for apprentices with SEND from the beginning of their courses.
- Ensure that teachers of hybrid lessons check the understanding of apprentices who are online as well as they do for those who are physically present.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133872
Address	Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN
Contact number	01142 222000
Website	https://www.sheffield.ac.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Professor Koen Lamberts
Provider type	Higher education institution
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 February 2019
Main subcontractors	Derby College South Cheshire College

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of apprenticeship delivery and compliance, 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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