

Skills College UK Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From October 2018, Ofsted undertook to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of apprenticeship training provision which began to be funded from April 2017 or after by ESFA and/or the apprenticeship levy. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the *Further education and skills inspection handbook*, especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Skills College UK Limited (SCUK) is an independent learning provider based in Golborne, Warrington. SCUK received its first publicly funded contract for apprenticeship training in February 2020. It specialises in apprenticeships and training in active leisure, leadership and management. At the time of the new provider monitoring visit, SCUK had seven apprentices following standards-based apprenticeships in level 3 personal trainer, level 3 team leader/supervisor and level 5 operations or departmental manager.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders made in ensuring that the provider is meeting all the requirements of successful apprenticeship provision?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and trainers work closely with employers to develop a curriculum that meets the needs of apprentices. They use their experience of the active leisure industry to create programmes that support apprentices to make an effective contribution to their employers' businesses. For example, leaders develop personal trainer programmes that include additional qualifications in lifeguarding to ensure that apprentices have the full range of skills they need for work at leisure centres with a swimming pool.

Leaders are ambitious for what apprentices can achieve and the contribution they can make at their employers' businesses. They frequently check that apprentices receive the high-quality training and support that they need to achieve their potential. Leaders have a clear oversight of the progress which apprentices make on their programme. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, apprentices continue to make their expected levels of progress.

Trainers prepare apprentices effectively for their final assessments. They work with employers to devise challenging projects that add value to their business, while also preparing apprentices for their end-of-programme assessment.

Leaders know and understand the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. They use their knowledge of apprenticeships and the active leisure sector to improve the quality of training for apprentices. For example, leaders identified apprentices' lack of understanding of the planning of macro-cycles in personal training. They successfully coached trainers to improve their teaching of the topic to better support their apprentices' development.

As there are only a few apprentices at the provider, trainers and leaders know them and their employers well. The tracking of apprentices' progress is effective and accurate. However, the systems which managers use do not always provide the details they would need to intervene promptly if an apprentice was falling behind.

Leaders have recently strengthened governance arrangements. Those in governance roles use their considerable experience of apprenticeship training to support, challenge and hold leaders to account for the quality of apprentices' training.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices?

Reasonable progress

Trainers have industry expertise and qualifications to provide training to create a challenging curriculum and support apprentices. They teach the curriculum in a logical order that builds on apprentices' prior knowledge and skills. Apprentices quickly develop their confidence in carrying out their job. For example, personal training (PT) apprentices complete their PT certificate early in the programme, so they can teach a variety of fitness activities and make an effective contribution to their employers' businesses.

Apprentices talk confidently about the substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours they have learned, that they now apply in their roles at work. Team leader apprentices explain how setting up departmental meetings has helped them improve communication with staff. This has improved relationships and the performance of their team.

Leaders' and trainers' adjustments to the curriculum because of COVID-19 restrictions have been well thought through and involved apprentices and their employer. For example, during lockdown and furlough periods, PT apprentices focused on developing theoretical knowledge of anatomy, physiology, mental health and nutrition. On returning to practical sessions, apprentices articulate how their new knowledge helps them work positively with clients. Apprentices are empathetic to the challenges of COVID-19 and the resulting changes in how they develop clients' fitness programmes.

Trainers assess apprentices' portfolio work regularly. The standard of work is at the right level, with aspirations for apprentices to achieve high grades. Trainers provide useful feedback on how apprentices can improve their work. For example, they give apprentices hints on providing more detailed information around nutrition and diet to support their clients' fitness improvement.

Trainers use reviews effectively to support and monitor apprentices' progress. Off-the-job training is linked to on-the-job training. Communication with apprentices' line managers is regular and informative. Employers are positive about the improvements which the apprentices make to their businesses, such as supporting junior staff. A few apprentices have not had their full entitlement to off-the-job training during the pandemic due to workplace staff shortages.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Reasonable progress

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and their team have the appropriate training, skills and experience to carry out their roles effectively. They use the provider's policies and procedures appropriately to keep apprentices and staff safe. The DSL records, actions and follows up on safeguarding incidents swiftly.

The safeguarding team works well with external agencies across the region to provide information and a referral service for apprentices on topics such as debt management, mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.

Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training. They receive bespoke training on topics such as the 'Prevent' duty, county lines, mental health awareness and online safety threats. Staff use this effectively to train apprentices and support their well-being.

Apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding and keeping themselves safe. Safeguarding is delivered in detail at induction and builds on the aspects of safeguarding that apprentices encounter in their work with members of the public.

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