

Quest Vocational Training Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1276417

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Inspection dates: 18–19 April 2018

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This visit was undertaken as part of a series of monitoring visits to a sample of new apprenticeship training providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy, or revised funding of non-levy apprenticeships. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

Quest Vocational Training Ltd (Quest) was formed in 2012 by three directors and is based in east Dorset. Since then, the company has specialised in providing apprenticeships for the health and social care sector; it also provides commercial courses for this sector. In May 2017, Quest became an independent provider, previously it operated as a subcontractor. Apprentices are with employers across the south of England.

There are currently 172 apprentices enrolled at Quest under their prime contract, 109 of whom are funded under the levy. Just over a third of apprentices recently began new standards apprenticeships in healthcare. There are 14 apprentices on level 5 apprenticeships in management of health and social care, half of the remaining apprentices are on level 3 apprenticeships and the rest on level 2. The large majority of apprenticeships are in health and social care. A small number of apprentices are undertaking apprenticeships in childcare or supporting teaching and learning in schools.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Directors and senior managers have ambitious and clear plans to become a high-quality provider to the health and social care sector. They recently restructured the company to enable them to better fulfil this ambition and have established clear lines of accountability for senior managers. They are increasing the number of apprentices on the prime contract as part of a sustainable strategic plan to meet the requirements of a range of different employers in this sector.

A new senior management team has appropriate expertise and experience in delivering high-quality apprenticeships. They set high expectations for staff and apprentices.

Managers and trainer/assessors work effectively with a large number of employers in a wide variety of health and care settings, including well-known regional companies; for example, in domiciliary care, residential care and schools for learners with high needs. They also work very well with nurseries and organisations that support vulnerable young people. Senior managers monitor the progress of their apprentices closely through regular contact with employers.

Trainer/assessors are highly experienced in their vocational areas. They have frequent contact with all employers to inform them about apprentices' progress and resolve any issues that may arise. Employers interviewed during the monitoring visit were very positive about the support they and their apprentices receive and praised the good quality of the communication with Quest staff.

Employers are clear about how apprentices improve their skills and confidence as a result of the training they receive. Employers cite examples of apprentices who develop their potential and go on to higher levels of training and employment, such as care team leaders. For example, staff at Quest are supporting one employer very effectively to provide apprenticeships for ex-drug users and those on rehabilitation programmes.

Almost all apprentices interviewed during the monitoring visit receive appropriate time and support from their employers to complete off-the-job training at work. Apprentices gain new knowledge and expertise from their training and through regular meetings with their trainer/assessors.

Most apprentices who do not have English, mathematics and information and communication technology qualifications achieve them due to the effective support they receive. However, trainer/assessors do not pay sufficient attention to developing further the skills and knowledge of apprentices who already have English and mathematics qualifications.

Quest staff provide good help and advice for employers and potential apprentices before they start their apprenticeships. This support ensures that the employers' business needs and apprentices' training are well matched.

Managers clearly and appropriately record the details of apprenticeships. This means that apprentices and employers are fully informed as to whether they are completing a framework or standards apprenticeship and they understand the relevant funding. However, most apprentices interviewed were not clear about the type of training programme they were on, and a few were unclear about the nature of their end-point assessment. Most employers interviewed were unclear about the structure and nature of apprenticeships and confused by terminology.

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**

All employers interviewed were clear about how their apprentices have improved their skills and behaviours as a result of undertaking their apprenticeship. For example, apprentices maintain more detailed case records and reports on their clients and make more meaningful contributions to client reviews.

Apprentices value the support and guidance they receive from their trainer/assessors, including resources available to them online. Apprentices receive good and relevant guidance in their individual sessions with their trainer/assessors and the work apprentices do in these sessions is linked well to their role in the workplace. For example, apprentices on supporting teaching and learning apprenticeships acquire good tips and techniques about managing pupil behaviour,

learn about government policy and theories of learning. Those on health and social care apprenticeships improve their understanding of dementia care and how to manage clients with the condition.

Most trainer/assessors check the understanding of their apprentices well with skilful questions and frequent reviews of apprentices' submitted written work. Apprentices find the online resources very helpful and these resources support the work set by trainer/assessors well. However, the feedback from trainer/assessors places too much emphasis on completing units and not enough on developing new skills or knowledge. This slows the progress of a small number of apprentices. The range of strategies that trainer/assessors use to develop apprentices' knowledge is limited so a few apprentices do not learn in the best way for them.

The recruitment team and trainer/assessors provide effective advice and guidance to apprentices and employers at the start of the apprenticeship. The assessment of apprentices' English and mathematics skills when they are recruited is thorough. However, some staff do not use the results from these assessments to identify what apprentices need to improve or to plan their learning.

Apprentices interviewed during this visit were keen to develop their chosen careers and were clear about how their apprenticeship could help them do this. The time between apprentices starting on the apprenticeship and the first visit of a trainer/assessor was too long for too many apprentices. Managers have responded promptly to these delays with a change in policy and are monitoring the situation closely.

Managers have identified areas requiring improvement in teaching, assessing and learning through a newly implemented observation process, which they are continuing to develop. They are providing further resources and training to help trainer/assessors improve their teaching and have plans for more trainer/assessors to complete teaching qualifications. Senior managers provide effective professional development for trainer/assessors, who keep up to date well with developments in the health and social care and education sectors.

The new senior management team has introduced effective quality assurance processes to evaluate the quality of training and promote continuous improvement. Managers involved all staff in the self-assessment process well and identified most areas for improvement highlighted through this visit. However, the process of self-assessment does not evaluate the views of apprentices and employers. Actions in the quality improvement plan are well considered and suitable but do not focus sufficiently well on their impact on apprentices and their learning.

Senior managers have recently introduced a new electronic system for recording the progress and training of apprentices. It is too early to assess the impact of the system as the transfer of all the information has not yet been completed. Operations managers monitor the progress of every apprentice well.

Board members meet regularly. They receive regular and helpful reports about the performance of staff, and the achievement, retention and progress of apprentices. They hold managers to account well.

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

Senior managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Appropriate policies and procedures are in place that clearly outline the responsibilities of staff. Staff and apprentices know how to report any concerns. Staff pay careful attention to ensuring the health and safety of apprentices in the workplace. Staff have received appropriate safeguarding and 'Prevent' training and centrally held records are up to date. Procedures for the safe recruitment of new staff are appropriate.

A new designated safeguarding officer is in post and has completed basic online safeguarding training but not yet appropriate 'Prevent' training. Directors have very recently decided that this role will now be filled by a senior manager to emphasise the importance of safeguarding throughout the company and strengthen links with external agencies; they have not yet provided the nominated manager with suitable training.

Trainer/assessors have regular useful discussions with apprentices about safeguarding and fundamental British values. A very large majority of apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding as a result of undertaking the mandatory training required by their workplaces.

A basic 'Prevent' action plan is in place. Senior managers are in the process of improving this to provide more specific details. Apprentices' knowledge of fundamental British values and the threats posed by extremist groups is limited as trainer/assessors do not explore these topics with them sufficiently well.

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