

iCount Training Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This monitoring 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. Ofsted's intention to carry out monitoring visits to these new providers was first announced by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in November 2017. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

iCount Training Limited (iCount) was set up in 2010 to provide accountancy training. Three private training providers subcontract accountancy training to iCount. In April 2017, the company received public funding to enable it to deliver apprenticeship training in its own right.

At the time of the monitoring visit, iCount was providing training for four assistant accountant apprentices at level 3 and four professional accounting taxation technician apprentices at level 4. All these apprentices were studying the new standards-based apprenticeships. iCount works with seven employers across Greater Manchester and Lancashire.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders and managers have a clear strategy for, and specific focus on, the delivery of successful apprenticeships in accountancy in the Greater Manchester and Lancashire areas. Leaders and managers have used effectively their previous experience of managing provision as subcontractors to ensure that the delivery of their new direct contract meets the apprenticeship requirements.

Leaders and managers plan appropriately to meet the requirements of the new contract. They work together with an external partner to pool expertise in programme design, safeguarding and management of information. Leaders and managers have employed new tutors and administrative staff to ensure that apprentices receive sufficient training and support.

Leaders and managers liaise effectively with employers to plan varied and relevant on- and off-the-job training programmes for apprentices. Apprentices comment that they enjoy high-quality training at iCount in bright, modern classrooms with good facilities. Apprentices receive good on-the-job support from their employers. They learn new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, apprentices develop specialist software skills such as using advanced spreadsheets. They become more

skilled at developing good relationships with clients, and their communication, presentation and teamworking skills also improve.

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices are on the correct apprenticeship level for the appropriate length of time. They consider apprentices' prior experience and qualifications carefully when giving advice about which apprenticeship to join.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses at iCount. They have recently put in place actions to improve areas such as the recording and monitoring of apprentices' progress from their starting points. Leaders and managers recognise that their self-assessment report and quality-improvement plan are not yet sufficiently robust or focused. Self-assessment reporting and quality-improvement planning are areas that require further improvement.

Managers and tutors have a detailed understanding of each individual apprentice's progress. Senior leaders recognise that as the number of apprentices increases, they need to develop ways of ensuring that they have a clear oversight of their progress to be able to hold their managers to account.

Leaders and managers work very closely together to review the quality of the provision. Partners do not currently meet formally, but make many of their decisions informally on a day-to-day basis. Partners receive regular updates on their apprentices' progress, including the examination results of their apprentices.

A governing board has been established very recently to support and challenge leaders and managers. However, this is in its infancy and no impact can yet be seen.

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

Leaders and managers carefully plan and manage apprentices' training. Alongside classroom-based training, which iCount tutors deliver half a day a week, apprentices make good use of webinars and high-quality online learning resources. They have a workplace mentor who reviews their progress at work and provides good ongoing support and guidance.

Apprentices develop a broad range of new occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours that they practise at work. For example, apprentices learn to use new accountancy systems, participate in and chair meetings, and build their own client caseloads. Employers recognise the benefits that apprentices bring to their business, for example using digital skills to automate workplace processes.

Current apprentices who have all met the standards requirement for English and mathematics qualifications continue to develop their English and mathematical

knowledge and skills. Tutors and employers check apprentices' written work routinely to improve their written English, particularly their spelling, punctuation and grammar. Apprentices recognise the importance of preparing financial reports for board members using accurate mathematics and a high standard of written English. Tutors give detailed developmental feedback on written work and mock examinations to help apprentices improve the quality of their work.

Tutors are well qualified and experienced. Apprentices are very positive about tutors' knowledge and how they use real work examples to bring subjects to life.

Most apprentices are making the progress of which they are capable. Tutors use apprentices' starting points effectively when they set their targets. Tutors set apprentices realistic individual time periods in which to achieve their accountancy examinations. The vast majority of apprentices achieve good results. Leaders and managers recognise that apprentices need to log their progress and achievements in their online portfolios more systematically.

Apprentices' progress reviews are regular and they involve the apprentices, their employer and the skills and development coach. In a small minority of reviews, tutors do not challenge the few apprentices who are falling behind. On occasions, the record-keeping is not as thorough or as complete as it should be; for example, employers or apprentices do not always sign a copy of the written record of the review.

Leaders have recently introduced formal arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. During observations of learning sessions, managers focus specifically on the progress that apprentices make and do not focus unduly on what the tutor does. Leaders and managers have yet to establish how they will use the observation process to improve teaching, learning and assessment, for example to identify and share best practice or inform their staff training plan.

Off-the-job training is sufficient, well planned and recorded on apprentices' individual learning plans. It is the responsibility of apprentices to record their off-the-job training hours and achievements in their e-portfolio. However, tutors do not ensure that all apprentices do this systematically. As a result, late or poor recording results in some inaccuracy in the apprentices' progress reports to managers. Although employers have access to the e-portfolio, leaders and managers at iCount do not ensure that they use it efficiently to link on- and off-the-job training.

Apprentices have a clear understanding of the requirements of their end-point assessment and what they need to do to achieve the apprenticeship standards. Employers are less clear about the detailed requirements of the new apprenticeship standards in accountancy.

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

Leaders and managers make safeguarding apprentices a priority. Managers have created useful safeguarding policies and procedures, including the 'Prevent' duty, which staff understand. Within these policies and procedures insufficient attention is given to ensuring that apprentices have a good understanding of how to work safely when online or how they apply this knowledge in their work.

Managers have not yet had to investigate any safeguarding incidents, so systems and procedures have yet to be tested. The designated safeguarding officer (DSO) and two other staff have completed safeguarding training at level 3 which prepares them appropriately for their role. Staff complete relevant and regular online safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty training to update their knowledge, understanding and behaviours.

Managers ensure that effective safer-recruitment practices are in place. They check staff references and their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom. Managers ensure that all staff who work on the apprenticeship programme have had the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service check.

Apprentices feel safe and inspectors did not observe any who were at immediate risk. They follow an induction programme and have access to a helpful apprenticeship handbook. Appropriate health and safety processes are in place. Leaders and managers could improve these further by completing a risk assessment of the learning environment and the use of computers. Apprentices know the contact details of the DSO. However, leaders could strengthen these details by including alternative contacts in the event of the DSO not being available or on holiday.

Overall, the information that apprentices receive on safeguarding is adequate. This includes information on bullying and harassment, radicalisation and extremism, and how to work safely online. Although apprentices receive this information, not all of them have developed a good enough understanding of how it applies to them and the potential impact in their workplace.

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