

The Development Fund Limited

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 2495131

Name of lead inspector: Martin Ward HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: St Margaret's Bus Station
Gravel Street
Leicester
LE1 3AG



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 the Education and Skills Funding Agency (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 'Providers newly directly funded to deliver apprenticeship training provision' and 'Monitoring visits'. The focus of these visits is on the three themes set out below.

The company was established in 2005. For the past 13 years, it has specialised in providing apprenticeship training for workers in passenger transport, business administration, customer services, and team-leading. In April 2017, The Development Fund Limited became a prime-contract independent training provider; before that it operated as a subcontractor. The provider has enrolled 106 apprentices under the prime contract and continues to deliver apprenticeships as a subcontractor. It has received funding through the apprenticeship levy. Currently, 54 apprentices are in learning, 15 are on a break in learning, and 37 apprentices have withdrawn from the programme. All apprenticeship programmes are at level 3, with most apprentices studying the new standards in travel consultancy, and 15 on a framework in team-leading; these 15 are the apprentices who were on the break in learning during the visit.

Themes

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

Insufficient progress

Leaders enrol most apprentices onto the level 3 standards-based apprenticeship in travel consultancy. This is not the provider's area of expertise. As a result, leaders relied too heavily on the employer's advice and did not take sufficient control of the quality of the apprenticeship programme. Leaders did not act on the risks associated with high labour turnover in the travel industry. Leaders and managers did not ensure that, at enrolment, apprentices understood the requirements of the programme and knew that they had to commit to 18 months of study. As a result, too many apprentices left the programme without achieving the qualification.

Leaders have re-assessed their strategy. They have sensibly stopped any further recruitment of apprentices from the travel industry. They have worked with the employer to strengthen the initial advice and guidance for any future recruitment. They are planning to develop traineeships and apprenticeships in the passenger transport industry, which is their specialism.

Leaders and managers enrolled 15 driving instructors onto an appropriate apprenticeship in learning development. However, after nine months the employer requested a break in learning due to a staff consultation process involving potential redundancies. At the point of the learning break, apprentices were making slow progress. Managers intend to re-start the learning in January.

Managers have recruited assessors who are appropriately qualified and experienced in the sectors in which they work. For the travel consultants, a member of staff from the employer provides most of the off-the-job training. Although the provider is closely involved in the content of the training, managers do not assess the quality of the teaching and learning. Neither do they meet with the trainer to identify strengths and weaknesses and actions for improvement.

Leaders and managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of their assessors. However, when they identify issues with the poor performance of assessors, managers do not set and record actions for improvement in a consistent or timely way. Managers do not improve the performance of assessors quickly enough.

Through the observation of teaching and learning, managers provide feedback to assessors which identifies areas for improvement. However, managers do not ensure that assessors address these weaknesses and that the quality of teaching and learning improves.

Leaders invested in new systems for the development of English and mathematics and for the tracking of the progress of apprentices. Apprentices who needed to achieve the qualifications in functional skills did not make sufficient progress. Leaders' decision to rely solely on the online learning materials has proved to be unwise. Leaders are planning to deploy a specialist tutor to support apprentices in the development of their English and mathematical skills from January.

Leaders and managers do not track the progress of apprentices in sufficient detail. They do not have an accurate understanding of the progress that apprentices are making towards achieving the key elements of the apprenticeship programme. Managers rely on the information they receive from assessors. Too often this is late. Managers do not know how well assessors prepare apprentices on standards apprenticeships for the end-point assessment.

Managers ensure that apprentices record their off-the-job training. Most apprentices state that they do not receive sufficient time to complete their training, although the variation between sites within the employer is significant. Managers cannot prove that apprentices receive their off-the-job training entitlement.

Leaders produce a self-assessment report and quality improvement plan. They do not identify separately the strengths, weaknesses or actions for improvement for apprentices on the prime contract, as distinct from their other work as a subcontractor. Therefore, the self-assessment report is misleading and unhelpful as an aid to quality improvement. Within these documents, managers do not record the poor retention and progress of apprentices on their prime contract as a provider of apprenticeships. They do not identify the actions necessary for improvement. Leaders and managers meet frequently with the main employer to discuss the progress of the travel consultant apprentices. Managers record minutes of these meetings but do not produce precise actions or hold staff to account.

Leaders do not receive a regular external perspective on the quality of their work. The external challenge to the work of the senior team is non-existent. As a result, the design and implementation of the strategy for the introduction of the work as a prime contractor have been weak.

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

For the apprenticeship in travel consultancy the employer delivers most of the classroom-based, off-the-job training. Assessors guide, assess and monitor apprentices' progress through the apprenticeship. In close collaboration with the employer, assessors provide appropriate learning resources and assessments which reflect current business practice.

Most apprentices rightly value the support and guidance they receive from their assessors. Assessors meet with apprentices frequently to review progress in relation to the completion and setting of assignments.

Apprentices on the travel apprenticeship gain new knowledge of the travel industry, and they deepen their understanding of the products they sell. Apprentices improve their understanding of the geographical destinations which are part of their work. Assessors design assignments which test this knowledge well.

Apprentices produce work at the standard expected for the level of programme.

Where apprentices receive good support from their line managers they receive sufficient time to complete their training while at work. However, most apprentices do not receive enough time to complete their studies and, as a result, they complete their work at home. These apprentices make slower progress.

Assessors do not use the information on apprentices' starting points well enough to plan learning effectively. They do not set challenging individual targets or plan the development of behaviours and skills so that apprentices can make rapid progress. Assessors focus on the submission and completion of assignments or worksheets at set times. As a result, apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.

Managers do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of the progress apprentices make. They have not taken action quickly enough to enable apprentices to be back on track when they have fallen behind.

Assessors report on the completion of assessments, but they do not provide sufficient information on the development of skills and behaviours. Managers and assessors do not ensure that apprentices develop the skills required for professional discussion throughout their programme in preparation for their end-point assessment.

Assessors do not provide feedback to apprentices which provides them with an accurate view of the progress they are making on their programmes. Too few apprentices know what they need to do to achieve higher grades.

Too many apprentices who are due to complete in April are behind target. This is a concern, especially given that January is the busiest month for travel consultants.

Leaders do not ensure that the employer's managers understand the structure of the apprenticeship. As a result, these managers do not have an accurate view of the progress apprentices make. The employer is therefore unable to provide the most effective support.

Managers do not plan the development of English and mathematical skills early enough in apprentices' programmes. Apprentices who are due to complete have not yet had support to develop these skills. Assessors do not provide feedback on marked work to ensure that apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills.

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

Senior leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures contain clear statements about the responsibilities and duties of managers and staff in safeguarding their apprentices. Staff understand how to identify and report any concerns they have.

Senior leaders and managers carry out safe recruitment and selection procedures when employing staff. Senior leaders have not ensured that the list of safeguarding checks for seconded staff or subcontracted staff is complete and they do not update it regularly. During this monitoring visit, it took some time for managers to provide evidence and complete this task.

The appointed designated safeguarding officer has appropriate training. Senior leaders and managers ensure that all staff receive relevant online training. Assessors undertake a formal qualification, which ensures that their understanding is current.

Managers ensure that apprentices are safe online and that employers have appropriate systems for monitoring online activities. Managers conduct regular and thorough audits of health and safety at each of the employers' sites.

Assessors integrate well safeguarding, British values and the threats presented by radicalisation and extremism into their reviews. However, the recording of these conversations in the records of the reviews lacks detail. Most apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding. Apprentices feel safe and know how to report concerns.

Senior managers do not yet receive regular reports on safeguarding, or any safeguarding-related incidents, to assure themselves that they comply with their legislative duties.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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