Valkyrie Support Services Ltd

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	1276411
Name of lead inspector:	Richard Deane HMI
Inspection dates:	8–9 January 2019
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	School House Farm Beamhurst Uttoxeter Staffordshire ST14 5EA

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 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.

Valkyrie Support Services Ltd started training in 2005. Since then, it has been a subcontractor to colleges and independent learning providers. It has also provided a range of non-funded accredited courses in the engineering, manufacturing and business sectors. The provider registered to receive public funding for the first time in May 2017. At the time of the inspection, there were 106 apprentices, all funded through the levy and working towards apprenticeships at levels 2, 3 and 5. The majority of apprentices undertake standards-based apprenticeships. Most apprentices are aged 19 and over. The provider does not subcontract any provision.

Themes

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

Leaders have a strong commitment to delivering training and learning that match precisely to the needs of employers. They have worked closely with a range of employers – particularly in the engineering and food manufacturing sectors – to develop training to improve manufacturing quality and productivity. Leaders have been careful to grow the provision steadily to ensure that all apprentices receive effective teaching, learning and assessment in the workplace. The in-year data shows that very few apprentices leave early and most make good progress towards achieving their qualifications.

Because of their previous industry experience, leaders have a good understanding of the curriculum required for each workplace. They plan learning skilfully so that apprentices develop the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours their employers demand. Leaders also plan additional learning activities for apprentices. For example, apprentices learn about continuous improvement strategies to help them reflect and critically analyse their working practices. Consequently, these apprentices are able to adapt their activities and improve the quality of their work. Employers value highly the contribution apprentices make to their businesses.

As well as having a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum, leaders have clarified the assessment requirements for each standards-based apprenticeship. They have engaged with end-point assessment organisations so that tutors can help apprentices develop the additional skills they will need to be successful in the final assessment. For example, an apprentice may need to be proficient at delivering presentations and talk confidently about their work in a professional discussion.

Leaders have adapted their learning and assessment strategies appropriately to include mock assessments to help apprentices practise and master these skills. Leaders ensure that tutors have the current industrial expertise to develop apprentices in the workplace effectively. They recruit tutors who have the occupational experience for current and planned apprenticeship provision. Leaders ensure that tutors gain appropriate teaching and assessor qualifications so that they deliver consistently effective teaching, learning and assessment.

During the recruitment process, apprentices complete a comprehensive occupational skills scan to identify their prior knowledge and skills relating to their job role. Tutors also provide apprentices with appropriate information and advice about their apprenticeship and future roles. Consequently, apprentices are motivated to develop new skills, achieve their apprenticeship and move on to the next stage in their career.

All apprentices receive a useful and comprehensive induction that includes an initial assessment of their existing English and mathematics skills. Tutors use this information appropriately to identify any gaps in their knowledge of these subjects. Most apprentices achieve their English and mathematics qualifications in the time allocated. However, too few tutors help those apprentices who already hold the requisite qualifications in these subjects to continue developing their English and mathematics skills. Additionally, a few tutors do not have the sufficient skills and qualifications to deliver these subjects confidently.

Leaders monitor closely apprentices' progress towards completing their qualifications. They ensure that tutors provide effective support if apprentices fall behind in their work. More recently, they have started to monitor apprentices' behaviours and skills that are required for standards-based apprenticeships. Tutors routinely challenge apprentices to improve their work. However, they do not yet use information about apprentices' starting points sufficiently well so that they make the progress that they could. Consequently, leaders cannot be certain that all apprentices make the progress of which they are capable.

Leaders and managers use information about apprentices' progress towards achieving their qualifications effectively to ensure that tutors maintain the high standards expected of them. Managers meet frequently with tutors to discuss their performance and, where necessary, provide the appropriate support and intervention to tackle any underperformance. In most cases, tutors improve their practice thanks to the support that they receive. In a few instances, tutors fail to improve sufficiently and leave the organisation.

Leaders' self-assessment of their provision is broadly accurate and self-critical. For the most part, improvement actions result in improved outcomes for apprentices. For example, learning walks and a peer observation process have begun to improve the quality of tutors' teaching, learning and assessment practice. However, actions to ensure that all apprentices achieve their potential are not sufficiently precise to make their success certain.

Leaders are subject to frequent oversight from the providers from whom they subcontract provision. However, leaders realise that there is insufficient external oversight to hold them and the team of managers to account. They aim to secure suitable governance arrangements urgently.

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**

Apprentices benefit from the training that they receive and develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours required for their work. For example, management apprentices are able to plan more effectively their team roles and adapt working arrangements after learning about models of effective teamwork.

Tutors help apprentices to identify gaps in their understanding and develop the skills necessary to develop in their careers. In particular, older apprentices become more confident in their work, helping them to improve their technical capabilities and communication. For example, one apprentice moved from an operations role to become a team leader because of their newly acquired skills.

Apprentices benefit from effective off-the-job training that links closely to their workplace. Training sessions are well planned. Tutors confidently use a variety of teaching and learning activities that interest and engage apprentices in their learning. For example, during a self-reflection activity, apprentices critically analysed their behaviours and attitudes at work. Consequently, they developed their understanding of managing teams successfully in the workplace. Apprentices use their time efficiently to complete most of their studies at work.

Apprentices receive highly effective support from their tutors. Tutors are well qualified and experienced in their respective fields and draw on this expertise to provide apprentices with helpful feedback and advice to improve their performance. As a result, apprentices produce practical and written work of a good standard. For example, engineering apprentices improved their manual dexterity while refining their filing skills – learning to guide the file instead of using a saw action to produce the appropriate finish.

Tutors use information about apprentices' starting points effectively to place them on the level of qualification appropriate to their role and previous experience. Apprentices understand the structure of their apprenticeship programme and know

what they must do to complete each component successfully. They are aware of the end-point assessment and the opportunity to achieve higher grades. Tutors, however, do not set apprentices specific targets to help them achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Most apprentices make good progress towards achieving their qualifications. However, a small minority of apprentices studying English, mathematics and information and communication technology do not make the progress expected of them. Apprentices at risk of falling behind in their work receive additional support from their tutors. Tutors monitor their progress closely and provide the appropriate feedback to help them get back on track.

Employers are kept fully apprised of their apprentices' learning activities and progress. However, a few of the apprentices' line managers are less well informed and less able to plan work effectively so that apprentices meet the requirements of the apprenticeship. These line managers are not sufficiently involved in progress reviews and fail to provide essential feedback to help apprentices achieve more rapidly. The large majority of workplace mentors provide good support to apprentices, although – in a very few cases – they do not take enough interest in the apprentices' progress. This results in apprentices feeling devalued.

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

Leaders and managers ensure that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place and that apprentices feel safe.

Leaders have established appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. For example, leaders have an effective safer recruitment process. Leaders ensure that all new staff receive the requisite background checks, including nationality, past employment, prior qualifications and residency. The central record is accurate and up to date, ensuring that all staff who work directly with apprentices have met the requisite disclosure and barring checks.

The designated safeguarding officer (DSO) is a senior member of staff and holds an appropriate safeguarding qualification. All senior staff and tutors have safeguarding qualifications to level 2. Leaders have recently appointed a deputy DSO who is due to take the appropriate safeguarding qualification.

All staff have received the appropriate training for the 'Prevent' duty and health and safety. Consequently, tutors confidently discuss these topics with apprentices to help them deepen their understanding. Apprentices demonstrate a good awareness of the 'Prevent' duty and the potential threats posed from extremist behaviour online and at work. Apprentices receive comprehensive and helpful induction handbooks and cards with contact information. They know who to contact if the need arises. Apprentices

demonstrate a good understanding of health and safety in the workplace, particularly in some hazardous engineering environments.

Staff act quickly and take the appropriate action when dealing with safeguarding concerns. They have developed links with regional multi-agency safeguarding hubs to ensure that appropriate referrals are made where needed, including for mental health support.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Learner View
Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

Employer View
Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to
www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: http://eepurl.com/iTrDn.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019