

GLAS Business Solutions Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Victor Reid, HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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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 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 themes set out below.

GLAS Business Solutions Limited is a private limited company established in 2010 by its current director. It provides a range of business support, and commercial and publicly funded training services to business across the United Kingdom. In March 2017, the company was successful in joining the register of apprenticeship training providers. At the time of this monitoring visit, the company had 57 levy-funded apprentices in learning spread across England, of whom five are on a level 2 standards-based apprenticeship in supply chain and warehousing. The remaining 52 apprentices are working towards level 2 and level 3 framework qualifications in business improvement techniques. Commercially funded programmes and apprentices funded by the devolved administration in Wales are not within the scope of this visit.

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 set an ambitious vision for the organisation and are closely involved in the day-to-day running of the business. They understand well its strengths and areas for improvement. They are committed to ensuring a strong, employer-focused approach to the provision of high-quality training for apprentices. Leaders and employers work diligently to ensure that apprentices receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training.

Leaders use well their long-standing partnerships with employers to ensure that the courses they provide match local and regional employment needs. Leaders make effective use of their close involvement in a trailblazer group to ensure that apprenticeship programmes match closely the needs of both apprentices and employers. Leaders ensure that programmes meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship.

Leaders ensure that the planning and ordering of course content enable the new knowledge, skills and understanding that apprentices gain to be of immediate benefit and relevance in the workplace. For example, apprentices working towards qualifications in business improvement techniques work collaboratively in small teams on a range of industrial projects designed to improve business productivity that is specific to each site.

Leaders ensure that apprentices receive good-quality advice and guidance about the demands of the course and career options that are available to them upon completion. Almost all apprentices remain in the sector after completion of their qualifications, and a few secure early promotions to more demanding supervisory roles. Leaders are developing the curriculum well. They have a clear focus on the planned introduction of a range of higher level qualifications to provide next-step progression pathways for current apprentices.

Leaders set high expectations for apprentices; apprentices are achieving good outcomes. Based on the provider's own data for 2017/18, the large majority of apprentices complete their programmes within the planned timescale. English and mathematics first-time pass rates are also high.

Leaders have carefully planned, and are implementing assiduously, appropriate new systems that ensure teaching, learning and assessment practices are of a good or better standard. Consequently, most apprentices receive teaching and learning that enable them to make secure progress that is in line with the challenging targets set out in their individual learning plans.

The observation of teaching and learning processes provides leaders with an accurate assessment of the quality of teaching and learning. Observers provide detailed and incisive feedback to tutors on their strengths and the areas that they need to improve. However, a few aspects of the provider's self-assessment and associated quality improvement processes are insufficiently evaluative. For example, the observation process does not include judgements of the standard of apprentices' progress reviews.

Leaders provide tutors, all of whom are appropriately qualified and vocationally experienced, with relevant professional training and development. This is to improve their performance and meet their ongoing development needs. Leaders monitor frequently the progress that tutors make towards achieving agreed improvement actions.

Leaders' analysis and use of management information are insufficiently comprehensive and require improvement. While leaders make routine use of a variety of internal operational reports to closely monitor apprentices' progress and performance, they do not cover all aspects of the apprenticeship programme. For example, leaders do not routinely analyse the performance of apprentices by gender, ethnicity and learning disability, so as to ensure that all groups of apprentices achieve equally well.

Directors have made swift progress in developing an outline plan to introduce a non-executive director role to provide independent guidance and challenge to leaders.

However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this recently proposed arrangement.

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

Tutors plan teaching and learning well. They are enthusiastic and positive role models for apprentices. Tutors use their good occupational knowledge and experience effectively to deepen apprentices' vocational knowledge and understanding and in developing new vocational skills.

Tutor use good examples from the world of work, such as using live industrial assignments, to make learning more relevant. As a result, apprentices quickly develop up-to-date, industry-standard skills that are of direct benefit to them and their employers.

Tutors review apprentices' progress frequently and provide helpful and developmental feedback on what they need to do to achieve a higher level pass mark in graded vocational examinations. Assessment practice is fair, reliable and frequent.

Apprentices benefit from good peer support because of the well-planned coaching sessions. They enjoy solving problems together and explain how this collaborative approach is useful in their employment, as well as in their studies.

Apprentices rapidly gain increased levels of confidence. They extend their knowledge and understanding of how the principles of business improvement apply to their specific workplaces. For example, apprentices quickly acquire the technical skills to utilise a wide variety of continuous improvement techniques that improve workplace productivity.

Most apprentices confidently articulate how their newly acquired theoretical and practical skills have helped them at work. For example, apprentices identify improvements in their confidence and interpersonal skills, when working as part of a team, and in the requirement to present an end-of-course project to their peers and senior management team.

Apprentices develop good English and mathematical skills. Tutors routinely use the results arising from initial assessment testing in English and mathematics to plan challenging learning in these essential subjects. All apprentices without GCSE qualifications in both English and mathematics at grades 4 to 9 receive good encouragement to take functional skills qualifications at a level above that required for the apprenticeship. Almost all gain these qualifications at their first attempt.

Trainers routinely utilise a bespoke assessment process, to identify accurately apprentices' vocational starting points. However, this does not provide tutors with useful information about apprentices' behaviours related to the qualification.

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

The arrangements for the safeguarding of apprentices are effective. Leaders ensure that apprentices routinely benefit from, and have access to, safe and secure learning environments. Prior to the start of any on-site training, trainers check all workplaces to ensure that appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place.

Leaders undertake pre-employment checks for all staff and ensure that safer recruitment processes are an integral part of the company's staff recruitment procedures.

The designated safeguarding officer (DSO) has received suitable training and has benefited from ongoing training to maintain her knowledge and expertise when responding to safeguarding matters. So far, there are no reports of safeguarding concerns. The DSO maintains an accurate list of relevant external agencies for each of the local authority areas in which apprentices work, should the need arise to make a referral.

Trainers work closely with employers to ensure that apprentices have a secure understanding of the health and safety and safeguarding arrangements on employers' premises. For example, trainers provide apprentices with pertinent and detailed information and advice regarding the importance of contributing to a 'culture of zero harm' in the workplace. Apprentices routinely demonstrate safe working practices at work by adhering to site-specific safe working practices.

Leaders and tutors ensure that apprentices benefit from an informative induction and a very detailed course handbook that together outline a wide range of support available to them at times of crisis. These include helpful information regarding mental health, bereavement, domestic violence, and bullying and harassment. Apprentices say that they feel safe and know whom to contact if they have any safeguarding or other concerns.

Leaders ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures for staff and apprentices are fit for purpose. For example, leaders have updated appropriately policies and procedures in line with the 'Prevent' duty and staff undertake annual refresher training. Leaders ensure that staff have a secure understanding and awareness of the signs that indicate that an apprentice may be at risk of radicalisation and extremism, and the actions they should take.

Apprentices demonstrate an appropriate understanding of safeguarding and the importance of British values. They have a basic awareness of how to stay safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremist ideas, including when they are online and using social media. However, trainers do not routinely discuss such matters during planned reviews. Leaders have very recently introduced a fortnightly newsletter to extend and refresh apprentices' knowledge of these important aspects. It is too soon to judge its effectiveness.

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