

EJ Markham and Son Ltd, trading as Markerstudy Limited

Monitoring visit report

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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 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.

The Markerstudy Group of Companies (the 'Group'), established in 2001, is based in the UK. The Group acts as an umbrella organisation comprising a network of companies operating in the insurance, publishing, automotive windscreen repair and hospitality industries. These companies employ over 3,000 staff in locations across the United Kingdom. Senior Group managers decided to offer directly delivered, levy-funded apprenticeship provision from May 2017.

The Group currently has 20 apprentices funded through the employer levy. Of these, 13 follow standards-based programmes in customer service and seven are on apprenticeship frameworks in automotive glazing. All apprentices are on level 2 programmes. Customer service apprentices work as call centre staff in the insurance sector and automotive glazing apprentices work as trainee technicians for a large national automotive glazing company.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices benefit from a well-organised training programme that meets in full the requirements of the Institute for Apprenticeships. Employers are committed to meeting these requirements, and leaders and managers monitor this commitment frequently and carefully throughout the programmes.

Leaders and managers have high expectations of apprentices and provide them with access to high-quality resources. Trainers and assessors are skilled in their trades and offer specialist expertise to apprentices. This contributes to apprentices' development of industry-standard skills and behaviours.

Links with employers are good. Leaders and managers have high expectations of employers and select only those who have suitable knowledge, skills and aspirations to deliver high-quality apprenticeships. Employers ensure that training and

development are key focuses for apprentices throughout their programme. For example, employers exclude apprentices from employee productivity targets, so that they can offer suitable support and development without there being an adverse impact on business operations. Leaders are not afraid to hold employers and partners to account if they fail to meet in full the Group's high expectations and standards.

Leaders, managers and employers listen closely to apprentices and value their views. Formal, twice-yearly surveys and regular dialogue support decision-making and improvement. Mentors and trainers have extensive and current industrial expertise that ensures that apprentices receive correct advice and guidance on technical aspects of their work. Mentors and trainers do not have the same level of expertise in teaching, learning and assessment. This occasionally limits the quality of apprentices' experiences. For example, mentors and trainers set specific targets for apprentices to complete technical tasks.

The Group's managers recruit apprentices with integrity. They ensure that apprentices enrol on a programme that will equip them with new skills, behaviours and attitudes that will benefit them and their employer. Apprentices make good progress, learn new skills and benefit from opportunities to further their career in the business.

The vast majority of apprentices achieve within their planned period of study. Almost all apprentices remain in employment on completion of their programme. Apprentices in automotive glazing have a structured career pathway to support their progress to 'elite technician' status. Several apprentices in customer services received a promotion during their apprenticeship, or soon afterwards.

Leaders' and managers' evaluation of the quality of the provision is accurate and identifies the few key areas for improvement. They are committed to continuous improvement and respond promptly to maintain high standards.

Governance and oversight arrangements are appropriate. A group director has responsibility and accountability for the apprenticeship provision, as documented in job descriptions and performance-monitoring procedures. The Group receives weekly reports on the apprenticeship programme. These contain essential information about the apprenticeship programme, but lack sufficient depth and detail to enable board members to monitor trends and patterns effectively. The board currently comprises four directors and one Group leader, which limits its capacity to provide independent and impartial scrutiny of the Group's performance.

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 learning new skills in a well-organised training programme. Group managers provide comprehensive off-the-job training. They ensure that apprentices have sufficient time and advice to develop occupationally specific skills

and professional behaviours. Off-the-job training includes one-to-one support, demonstrations, project work and teaching sessions. Employers are involved closely with the development of the training programme to ensure that apprentices acquire the skills needed for their job roles and for improving their prospects of promotion and career development.

Apprentices receive frequent progress reviews from their mentors and trainers. Mentors and trainers monitor accurately and closely the development of technical knowledge, skills and behaviours for all apprentices from their starting points. They challenge apprentices to achieve apprenticeship standards above those required by the awarding body. For example, an apprentice who lacked confidence and did not want to deal with customers at the start of his apprenticeship received support with specific training and development. He now works with the more-challenging customers and enjoys this environment.

The quality of apprenticeship work is good. Leaders, managers, mentors and trainers have very high aspirations for apprentices. They expect apprentices to achieve the highest standards and distinction grades at the end of their studies. The very large majority of apprentices are on track to complete within the planned period of study. Apprentices receive clear information, advice and guidance to enable them to make informed decisions about their training and next steps.

Managers, mentors and trainers provide good support to help apprentices develop their skills in English and mathematics. Apprentices develop their spoken English particularly well, which supports their customer service in the workplace. For the few apprentices required to achieve functional skills, delays in the delivery and assessment of these qualifications have resulted in late completion of the apprenticeship. Group managers have implemented suitable measures to address this issue.

Managers, mentors and trainers are highly skilled in the technical aspects of the apprenticeships. Apprentices benefit from detailed and immediate verbal feedback that supports improvement. However, other feedback is not always sufficiently detailed, and consequently apprentices do not always know how to improve further.

Managers review the quality of apprentices' experiences frequently and use this information to make improvements. They have a good understanding of the technical aspects of training for specific skills, but an insufficient understanding of how to make learning sessions enjoyable, interactive and challenging. For example, in workshop learning sessions not all apprentices are involved fully and a minority dominate the session. This leaves others disengaged and passive.

Managers, mentors and trainers understand the apprenticeship assessment arrangements. Apprentices are aware of the assessment requirements of their apprenticeship. They are prepared for their end-point assessments, and the vast majority achieve the highest grades. Reassessment arrangements, for the very few who fail to achieve the standards in full at the first attempt, are effective in ensuring that these apprentices also achieve.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders and managers are committed to ensuring that apprentices are safe in the workplace. Group managers implement fully their safeguarding and health and safety policies and processes, including specific young persons' risk assessments. They review and update policies and processes regularly and in line with the most recent 'Keeping children safe in education' guidance and the 'Prevent' duty.

Apprentices know how to stay safe, and what to do if they feel unsafe or at risk of harm. Specific procedures exist to ensure safeguarding arrangements for apprentices attending residential training, as part of their studies. These contribute to safe working practices and to apprentices feeling safe. Apprentices have a suitable understanding of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation and the importance of British values within their workplace. However, they do not understand sufficiently the relevance of these outside their work environment.

Managers deal comprehensively and promptly with safeguarding incidents and disclosures. They diligently follow Group policies and processes. They record disclosures accurately and in detail, and implement swiftly any lessons learned. Managers refer to outside agencies such as the police, social services and the local authority where required.

The Group has sufficient designated safeguarding officers at board and managerial level, all of whom have received appropriate training to undertake the role effectively. Mentors and trainers receive effective induction and training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

Leaders and managers ensure that all new employees receive appropriate background checks, such as previous workplace references and their right to work in the United Kingdom, before offering them a contract of employment.

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