

Solveway Limited

Monitoring visit report

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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 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.

Solveway Limited (SL) was formed in 2000 and provided training for a few providers and colleges in the sub-region of North Hertfordshire. In September 2017, SL began receiving public funding to provide apprenticeship training. It currently has 81 apprentices studying level 3 and level 4 programmes in a number of different roles. About a quarter are on standards-based programmes. These include assistant accountant, infrastructure technician, digital marketer, software development technician and customer service practitioner.

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 have a clear strategic aim to be the preferred provider for digital and financial apprenticeships in North Hertfordshire. While historically SL has specialised in the delivery of digital skills apprenticeships, they have more recently started to deliver apprenticeships in accountancy in response to employer demand locally.

Leaders and managers ensure that they carefully recruit apprentices. They work well with employers to construct apprenticeship programmes to meet their workforce requirements. Leaders have developed an effective recruitment strategy, working closely with employers, to recruit the right calibre of apprentice to meet their exacting requirements. As a result, apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills, behaviours and understanding that their employers greatly appreciate.

Leaders and managers have a good oversight of the progress that apprentices make on their programmes. They have a good understanding of which apprentices are on target and which are falling behind. Trainers intervene appropriately for those who are making slow progress to help them catch up. This includes additional twilight sessions to ensure that apprentices consolidate their knowledge prior to examinations.

Leaders and managers recruit staff with the appropriate qualifications and work sector experience to support apprentices in their learning. However, the recent increase in the number of accounting apprentices has led to a short-term staff shortage. Managers have recruited a new assessor to ensure that these apprentices receive timely feedback.

Leaders and managers have nurtured very effective relationships with employers. They ensure that apprentices receive regular and high-quality off-the-job training complemented by well-coordinated on-the-job training. Employers are right to acknowledge the positive contribution that their apprentices make to their businesses.

Leaders and managers ensure that they meet the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. Tutors ensure that they coordinate the on- and off-the-job training well and align them to the activities that apprentices complete in the workplace.

Leaders', managers' and tutors' planning for end-point assessment is effective. They ensure that extensive discussions take place with employers and apprentices to inform the timing of the end-point assessment. Trainers and work coaches ensure that apprentices receive effective support in preparation for end-point assessment. They inform employers of the support that apprentices will require to prepare fully for this assessment. As a result, all apprentices who have taken their end-point assessment have been successful.

Leaders are right to acknowledge that governance arrangements are underdeveloped. They do not receive any supervisory oversight, and consequently no one holds them to account for the quality of training or the progress that apprentices make on their programmes. Leaders are taking action to recruit a professional with the appropriate experience. However, at the time of the visit no arrangements were in place.

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 develop substantial new knowledge, skills, behaviours and understanding that are directly relevant to their workplaces. Employers value apprentices' new knowledge and provide them with effective support to perfect these competencies in the workplace. For example, accounting apprentices learn about tax rates and allowances and how they apply to personal and company accounts. They use this knowledge effectively to support clients in the completion of 'year-end' tax returns.

Trainers use the results of assessments completed at the start of the programme to construct a curriculum that allows the progressive development of knowledge, skills

and positive behaviours. They skilfully pose questions to deepen apprentices' understanding during learning activities. Most information technology infrastructure apprentices undertake additional courses that are helpful and closely related to their role. For example, digital apprentices complete programming training to help them work on cloud-based services.

Work coaches review apprentices' progress effectively. They scrutinise apprentices' completion of work, identifying barriers to learning, or other issues that may prevent apprentices from making at least their expected progress. Consequently, the vast majority of apprentices make the progress expected of them.

Most apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills well. Accountancy apprentices routinely use mathematical skills to prepare and submit accurate records to regulatory authorities. Apprentices improve their English skills through drafting emails to clients, and by communicating with official agencies. This includes the interpretation of highly technical information.

The assessment team does not set aspirational targets for apprentices. Too few apprentices have a good enough understanding of how to achieve high grades. The assessment team does not set apprentices challenging enough actions to achieve high grades and are content for apprentices to simply achieve a pass.

Leaders ensure that they develop the quality assurance of assessment practice, and that it is rigorous. However, their observation of teaching and learning focuses disproportionately on what trainers do, as opposed to what apprentices learn. Consequently, not all teaching sessions focus sharply enough on learning strategies that help learners to make good or better progress.

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

Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding apprentices. They have developed safeguarding policies and procedures that are comprehensive and that all staff use effectively. As a result, when a referral is necessary, all staff are fully aware of the processes they need to follow to ensure that apprentices are safeguarded.

The designated safeguarding lead, deputy safeguarding lead and safeguarding officers have all received the appropriate training to allow them to execute their role and support apprentices in their care. All apprentices are fully aware of whom to contact should they have a concern, as detailed in their extensive induction.

Staff and apprentices receive training on the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. Staff provide insightful and thought-provoking training to apprentices periodically throughout their programme. Consequently, apprentices have a good understanding of the risks in their community but also in the sector in which they work.

The designated safeguarding team takes immediate action when an apprentice, employer or member of staff raises a safeguarding or safeguarding-related concern. Staff diligently record any concerns on the appropriate paperwork to ensure that apprentices receive support. The designated safeguarding lead and his deputy monitor progress rigorously and maintain detailed records from initial reporting until successful completion.

Leaders and managers have nurtured very effective links with a range of external organisations and agencies to support their apprentices on their programme, and also in their personal lives. These links include local children's services departments, the local constabulary, adult care services and mental health charities. They publicise these links to apprentices via their dedicated internal social media network, progress reviews and monthly 'hot topic' discussions at taught sessions.

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