

Solvo Vir 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.

Solvo Vir Limited (SVL) began training apprentices as a subcontractor in January 2016. They were awarded a direct contract to provide apprenticeships in May 2017 and started training apprentices using levy funding in November 2017; this provision was in scope for the monitoring visit. SVL currently provides training for around 108 apprentices, almost all of whom study on standards-based programmes and the remainder on apprenticeship frameworks. Twenty-two apprentices follow level 2 standards, 73 follow level 3 standards, seven follow level 5 standards and five follow a level 3 framework. Apprentices are on standards-based programmes for recruitment consultant, business administrator, recruitment resourcer, team leader/supervisor, operations/departmental manager, assistant accountant and customer service specialist. Five apprentices follow a business administration apprenticeship framework. SVL offer apprenticeships nationwide through a network of regionally based trainer/assessors. SVL currently subcontracts the standards-based apprenticeship for financial services administrator for one apprentice to one organisation, Simply Academy Limited.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders have formulated a clear strategy and operational plan focused on upskilling the business and professional workforce to level 5. Their vision and pursuit of excellence is reflected in their objectives to ensure that apprentices receive good-quality education and training to enable them to perform their job roles to a high standard.

Leaders and managers have established highly effective links with employers. They maintain good communication with employers and mentors in the workplace to ensure that apprentices receive effective support on their training programmes. Employers are regularly involved in the review process and have a good understanding of the progress apprentices are making and what they need to achieve to complete their programme.

Since SVL became a levy-funded provider, leaders have recruited a management team with significant experience of managing apprenticeship provision. The priority to establish a team capable of supporting apprentices has helped ensure that most apprentices are making good progress towards achieving their apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers monitor closely and review carefully the apprenticeship programmes. For example, they quickly identified high levels of early withdrawals from the level 2 recruitment resourcer and level 3 recruitment consultant apprenticeship programmes. As a result, managers have improved the advice and guidance to ensure that potential apprentices and employers fully understand the requirements of these programmes. Leaders now promote level 3 recruitment consultant qualifications as a commercial alternative to the level 3 standards-based apprenticeship to better meet employers' needs. As a result, fewer apprentices now withdraw from these programmes.

Managers have taken swift action to improve the monitoring and reporting of the progress that apprentices make towards the apprenticeship standards. As a result, early interventions are in place to support any apprentices who are at risk of falling behind or making slow progress. However, trainer/assessors do not monitor the progress apprentices make in developing appropriate behaviours sufficiently.

Leaders and managers identify accurately the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship programme and respond quickly to improve provision. The observation process for judging the effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment (TLA) has been improved. This has helped managers identify improvements needed in TLA. Senior managers effectively monitor the outcomes from observations of TLA and the associated action plans and discuss these during staff appraisals. Trainer/assessors have clear key performance indicators by which managers hold them to account for the quality of delivery. This has led to improved planning and delivery of teaching and learning sessions and progress reviews.

Recruitment of apprentices is rigorous. Leaders and managers ensure that potential apprentices and employers fully understand the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. Apprentices who transferred from a failing provider in December 2018 were supported well to catch up and are now making good progress. Leaders and managers monitor rigorously the quality of training that the subcontractor provides.

Leaders and managers ensure that apprentices and employers are aware of the entitlement for apprentices to receive time for off-the-job training as part of their job roles. Managers have identified that a few employers do not always support apprentices with sufficient time for this. They now monitor more closely apprentices' recording of off-the-job training activities to ensure that apprentices receive their full entitlement. However, a few apprentices receive insufficient information from trainer/assessors about what activities can contribute to off-the-job training. For example, they log standard workplace tasks which do not constitute new learning.

Senior leaders have not put in place sufficiently rigorous governance arrangements for apprenticeships. The existing shareholder meetings focus too much on financial aspects of the company and not enough on the quality of the education and training that apprentices receive. A new non-executive director has very recently been appointed. He is aware that more information on the quality of apprenticeship

provision needs to be considered to help the board to provide support and challenge and hold leaders and managers to account.

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

Trainer/assessors have excellent subject knowledge and relevant industrial experience in their sectors. They skilfully use their own workplace experience during discussions to provide apprentices with a good standard of on- and off-the-job training that is contextualised to the workplace. Apprentices produce high-quality course work and demonstrate good workplace skills. For example, level 3 recruitment apprentices use their deeper understanding of the law relating to recruitment practice to provide better advice to clients.

Trainer/assessors quickly identify apprentices' starting points at the beginning of their training programme through a range of assessment activities. They make good use of this information to develop individualised training delivery plans to meet the needs of most apprentices and the needs of their employers.

Apprentices benefit from well-planned off-the-job learning activities that help them develop their knowledge and skills. For example, level 3 business administration apprentices conduct individual research projects and present these to their peers. They confidently challenge and question their peers, which deepens and consolidates their own knowledge. As a result, apprentices demonstrate good subject knowledge.

Apprentices can readily identify the new knowledge and skills they have developed as a result of their training and how it has improved their performance at work. They confidently articulate newly gained knowledge and theory, applying it well to their workplace and quickly respond to scenario-based problems set by their trainer/assessor. For example, level 3 business administration apprentices confidently demonstrated how they changed their approach to customer service as a result of better understanding the range of clients they deal with, who include older people, people who are hard of hearing and speakers of English as an additional language. Apprentices were able to swiftly adapt techniques to ensure that all customers receive a good service. Level 3 team leader apprentices use their new knowledge of coaching methods to better lead and manage their teams, selecting the most appropriate model for different situations.

Trainer/assessors employ a wide range of assessment methods to check apprentices' knowledge and skills, including written assessments, question and answer, work scrutiny, professional discussions and work-related projects. Apprentices receive thorough and regular assessment of the work they produce. Feedback from trainer/assessors is appropriately detailed and helpful, guiding apprentices in how they could improve their work to meet their target grades.

Trainer/assessors promote and contextualise fundamental British values well in teaching and learning sessions. For example, trainer/assessors use in-depth discussions with apprentices on the 'rule of law' in the context of The Equality Act

2010 and The General Data Protection Regulation and how these laws apply in their workplace as well as in daily life.

Managers have implemented effective quality monitoring processes. They make good use of apprentices' feedback and the outcomes from direct observation of teaching, learning and assessment to inform actions for quality improvements. Managers discuss the outcomes from lesson observations during staff appraisal to address weaknesses in the practices of individual members of staff. This has led to a few staff choosing not to remain with the company. Changes in staffing have impacted negatively on the experience of a few apprentices.

Managers have recognised the issues with staff turnover and quickly implemented more rigorous staff recruitment and staff induction processes. Support for new trainer/assessors is good. The comprehensive and individualised induction process supplemented by coaching and mentoring from existing staff benefit new staff. However, it is too soon to see the impact on staff retention.

Trainer/assessors do not pay sufficient attention to the development of apprentices' behaviours. For example, teaching and learning sessions focus on achievement of examinations rather than the behaviours required within the apprenticeship standards. Apprentices have a good appreciation of their own vocational development. However, too often progress reviews pay insufficient attention to apprentices' personal and social development.

Qualification achievement rates are good for the few apprentices who are required to achieve functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics. However, there is insufficient focus on the further development of English and mathematical skills for apprentices who are not required to complete qualifications.

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

Leaders and managers make safeguarding a high priority. They have developed appropriate safeguarding policies and processes which include aspects such as the 'Prevent' duty, whistleblowing and safe recruitment that are frequently updated. Leaders and managers ensure that staff understand policies and procedures through thorough induction processes and training.

Leaders and managers carry out safe recruitment and selection procedures when employing staff. Managers ensure that all staff have appropriate checks to help safeguard apprentices. They maintain a single central record of their staff's suitability to work with apprentices.

Leaders have put in place a designated safeguarding lead (DSL) assisted by two additional safeguarding leads to cover the regions in which they provide training to apprentices. All DSLs have completed additional safeguarding training to carry out their roles effectively. Appropriate processes are in place to report, record and review any safeguarding concerns raised. DSLs have contact details for all safeguarding boards within the regions in which they work. However, they have yet to establish

named contacts for each region to enable them to make referrals quickly. At the time of the monitoring visit, there had been no referrals made to external agencies.

All apprentices receive online training in safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values at the start of their programme. Trainer/assessors use their knowledge of safeguarding well during reviews with apprentices to discuss 'hot topics', contextualised to the workplace. For example, apprentices working in the recruitment sector demonstrate awareness of age discrimination when preparing job advertisements. Trainer/assessors engage apprentices in researching their own employer's procedures on bullying to help them develop their knowledge and understanding of how to identify and report bullying in the workplace.

Apprentices feel safe in their workplaces and are aware of the arrangements in place to protect them. They know to whom they should report any concerns. However, apprentices' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism varies considerably. While apprentices can remember covering these topics during induction, their understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism is limited. Trainer/assessors do not revisit these themes frequently enough.

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