

The Open University

Higher education institution

Inspection dates

26–28 February 2019

Overall effectiveness		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	Apprenticeships Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good	
Outcomes for learners	Good	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Apprentices quickly develop a comprehensive range of clinical skills and knowledge that meet the high standards expected by employers.
- University tutors and work-based supervisors closely monitor apprentices' vocational skills. As a result, apprentices make very good progress.
- The number of apprentices who remain on their programme continues to be high. The vast majority of apprentices who complete their programme achieve their qualifications in the planned time and continue into sustained employment.
- Apprentices benefit from a wide range of good support provided by university staff. This helps them to overcome barriers to learning.
- Apprentices receive good-quality, impartial advice and guidance that help them to make well-informed career choices.
- Leaders and managers have extremely effective partnerships with employers and other agencies and organisations.
- Governance is strong. Governors ensure that the provision widens participation in the community and meets national and local skills needs.
- Governors use their expertise and skills effectively to challenge and hold senior leaders and managers to account for the quality of provision and apprentices' outcomes.
- Leaders and managers have not fully implemented arrangements for end-point assessments for apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships.
- Leaders and managers do not use self-evaluation well enough to analyse fully the strengths and areas for improvement in the apprenticeship provision. Links between self-evaluation and quality improvement planning are not fully developed.
- The advice and feedback that tutors give to apprentices is not good across the programmes and a small minority of apprentices are not sure how to improve their work.

Full report

Information about the provider

- The Open University (OU) is a higher education institution offering a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate awards as well as degree-level apprenticeships at levels 5, 6 and 7. Apprentices working towards qualifications above level 5 are not within Ofsted's scope for inspection. The OU's headquarters are in Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, where qualifications and modules are planned, module materials are produced, and administrative activities take place. There are three national offices (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and two regional offices, in Manchester and Nottingham.
- At the time of the inspection, the university had 164 apprentices on courses up to level 5. Apprentices are on healthcare assistant practitioner and nursing associate courses. Thirty-four apprentices are working towards apprenticeships based on frameworks; the rest are on standards-based apprenticeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Fully implement arrangements for end-point assessment to meet the requirements of the standards-based apprenticeship.
- Improve the quality of feedback to apprentices so that they know clearly what to do to improve.
- Improve the self-evaluation process to ensure that key strengths and areas for improvement are clearly identified and better linked to planning to improve the quality of the provision.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers ensure that close and highly effective joint working with employers remains at the centre of their employer-focused work. Employers' and learners' needs are met particularly well through very flexible, well-tailored programmes. Local and national partners value highly the programmes offered by the university.
- Productive partnership work with the wider local communities, including local authorities and national health services, are also very effective. Partners work successfully with the university to plan appropriate training and employment opportunities that support the future development of apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers have a good focus on apprentices' overall progress, achievements, retention and destinations. These are rigorously monitored at all levels within the university.
- Apprentices benefit from a range of academic and employer-related qualifications and skills that enhance their employment and promotion prospects.
- Managers use university quality systems and processes effectively to monitor the quality of academic programmes and make improvements.
- Leaders manage the performance of staff well. They observe training staff frequently to measure quality and identify areas for improvement. Staff use continued professional development well to ensure that tutors' practice is at industry standard and teaching improves.
- Leaders and managers have developed self-evaluation but do not use it well enough to analyse fully the strengths and areas for improvement in the apprenticeship provision.
- Managers provide a wide range of effective support for apprentices with additional learning needs. Resources at the university are excellent and support all university students extremely well. University staff have developed strong systems to support apprentices who work in a wide variety of healthcare settings and often need flexible access to their trainers.
- Managers, staff and employers work well to best promote an ethos of equality and of valuing others' beliefs and attitudes that reflect British values well. A core principle that underlines the OU mission of widening participation is admitting students who have no prior qualifications or achievements. Tutors successfully support them to achieve their qualifications.

The governance of the provider

- Leaders and governors set a very clear and positive direction for the university to meet local, regional and national training and employment needs and priorities very well.
- They have highly successfully led the further development of their courses directed specifically to the needs of employers.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the apprenticeship provision at the university and challenge leaders to improve.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Arrangements for safeguarding for apprentices ensure their very close integration with overall arrangements to support university students.
- Managers have paid good attention to keeping pace with the development of safeguarding. All apprenticeship staff receive frequent, appropriate safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty training. All apprentices feel safe.
- Managers keep a university-wide incident log that is regularly reviewed to identify trends. There is clear evidence that actions are taken to resolve issues. Managers maintain very productive links with expert agencies to help take the most appropriate action to deal with safeguarding concerns.
- Leaders and managers have made good progress with the implementation of the 'Prevent' duty. Most apprentices are able to talk about 'Prevent' but more work is needed to reinforce and extend apprentices' knowledge.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Well-qualified tutors use their knowledge of current healthcare practices to create a wide range of interesting, stimulating and challenging learning activities for apprentices. Apprentices complete a foundation degree as part of their apprenticeship. Tutors provide a good range of learning activities. These help apprentices develop an understanding of the theory that underpins the skills that they need and how their role fits within the wider healthcare setting. As a result, their confidence and self-belief grow quickly.
- Apprentices rapidly gain new knowledge and skills that they value and use effectively in the workplace. For example, apprentices know the anatomy and physiology of the circulatory system, and this helps them when inserting a cannula. They also gain a better understanding of how the digestive system works when working with older patients.
- Apprentices benefit from comprehensive and effective support that meets their needs and is accessible when and how they need it. This is especially important for apprentices working in healthcare settings on shift work that limits the times when they can study and seek support. For example, apprentices working in busy hospital wards use the time between shifts to send text messages to their tutor seeking advice and guidance.
- Tutors use technology creatively and innovatively to enhance apprentices' learning experience and ensure that they can access the full range of services offered by the university at times most suitable to them. For example, staff offer an online careers fair in which apprentices located across the country can take part. This provides them with access to potential employers and careers advice.
- The central student support team makes very effective use of management information on apprentices' backgrounds and progress to identify those at risk of failing. Staff then provide very effective support that is tailored to individual apprentices' needs. As a result, apprentices make good progress.
- Tutors ensure that assessments are clearly and logically structured. They give apprentices

a good opportunity to demonstrate, through case studies, how they can apply the theory that they have learned to practical situations. Apprentices are encouraged to use reflective practice to help them develop and grow. This helps develop their independent learning and prepares them well for their professional careers.

- Tutors provide useful feedback that is clear, comprehensive and helps apprentices link theory and workplace learning. Written assignments are marked promptly so that apprentices know what progress they are making and can manage their workload. Feedback clearly explains what apprentices have done well, and what they need to do to improve their work. However, in a few cases, feedback from tutors is not helpful enough. Because of this, students are not always clear about how to complete assignments and correctly reference their resources.
- Apprentices have enough time for off-the-job training. They are encouraged to develop their independent learning skills and take ownership of their learning. For example, apprentices frequently self-assess their level of skill against the criteria and then, in consultation with workplace supervisors, they develop action plans to deal with shortfalls.
- Employers are well informed and appreciate the effective communication with the university. They receive frequent reports on their apprentices' progress and know who to contact if they have a concern. Employers also participate in decision-making about which modules apprentices complete, ensuring that they develop skills and knowledge aligned to the needs of their workplace.
- Apprentices practice and develop their skills in English and mathematics. Those with very limited experience of writing to appropriate academic standards are supported to develop their skills in this area. Apprentices are required to develop their mathematical skills, as they would need to use them in practice, recognising the need for accuracy and precision in the clinical settings. University staff have not yet integrated mathematics support for apprentices sufficiently to ensure that apprentices know how to perform clinical operations successfully

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices have high aspirations to make progress and achieve. Apprentices are articulate, ambitious and proud of their achievements. They quickly grow in confidence and many take additional responsibility in their workplace. Apprentices attend well and are punctual.
- Apprentices on the nursing associate programme can register with the Nurses Midwifery Council when they finish their apprenticeship. Employers and apprentices benefit greatly from this.
- Managers collaborate effectively at strategic and operational levels. This provides apprentices with access to a broad range of placements, enabling them to make informed decisions about the type of specialisms available within general, community and mental health nursing.
- University staff provide effective support for apprentices who have additional learning support needs such as dyslexia or mental health difficulties. This enables apprentices to make good progress through their programme.
- Apprentices take pride in their written work and develop skills that help them to produce

documents of a high quality. The large majority benefit from helpful marking and feedback on their assignments that promote development of their academic writing and accurate recording in the workplace.

- Good partnerships with employers mean that apprentices are given good initial information, advice and guidance to ensure the right employees are recruited and retained. This is reflected in the high retention rates.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The number of apprentices staying on their programme continues to be very high. The very large majority of apprentices taking foundation degrees in health and social care successfully complete their programmes of study. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within the planned time remains high. Apprentices' attainment in foundation programmes is good; just over half gain distinctions.
- Most apprentices who have passed qualifications in English and mathematics before joining the apprenticeship programme develop and extend their academic writing skills. However, tutors do not always reinforce the practical application of mathematics to apprentices in their clinical work.
- Employers are positive about the strong occupational and employability skills that apprentices gain from their course. Apprentices interviewed benefited substantially from the support for their development of clinical skills and healthcare behaviours. Several apprentices have successfully moved on to higher-level graduate courses through the university.

Provider details

Unique reference number	133849
Type of provider	Higher education institution
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	124
Principal/CEO	Vice Chancellor Mary Kellett
Telephone number	0300 303 5303
Website	http://www.open.ac.uk/

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-	164	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	none							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	none							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	none							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the apprenticeship policy and compliance manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection considered all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Bob Cowdrey, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Hill	Her Majesty's Inspector
Roland White	Ofsted Inspector

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