

UK Power Networks

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 May 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.

UK Power Networks (UKPN) operates an electricity distribution network across East Anglia, Greater London and the South East. UKPN have previously funded and delivered their own apprenticeship programme. Since May 2017 UKPN has delivered levy-funded apprenticeships. Four training centres are located in Kent and Suffolk. Technical training for apprentices aged 16 to 18 is delivered by Bridgewater and Taunton College and for those aged 19 and above by Utility and Construction Training under subcontracting arrangements. At the time of the monitoring visit there were 69 apprentices, of which 54 were aged 16 to 18 and 15 were adults. All 69 apprentices are on the Power Networks Crafts Person Level 3 apprenticeship, of which five are on the UKPN Smart Metering Programme. All apprentices are standards-based.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Senior leaders and managers ensure that the apprenticeship programme is central to their strategy to recruit and retain staff to meet the needs of the business now and in the future. All apprentices are new recruits to the company. Managers ensure that the length of the apprenticeship programme reflects the skills and knowledge that apprentices have. Those with industry related experience complete their programme within two years. For those young people joining with little experience they complete their apprenticeship over a three-year period.

Senior leaders ensure that the company makes a significant investment in the apprenticeship programme over and above the levy funding. In addition to travel, subsistence and accommodation the company pays for good enrichment activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Apprentices feel valued and many see their long-term future at UKPN.

Senior leaders provide effective oversight of the apprenticeship programme. The director with responsibility for the apprenticeship programme receives frequent and detailed updates on the programme from managers. Consequently, he is very well informed of the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. The director meets with apprentices, sees them in training and provides effective challenge to managers to make improvements to the programme.

Leaders place a high priority on off-the-job training, which is of a very good standard. Apprentices spend around a third of their time training off-the-job. This includes activities such as outdoor pursuits and volunteering through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme that helps apprentices develop their personal and social skills, their ability to work in a team and to contribute to the community.

Apprentices receive good support to prepare for their end-point assessment (EPA). A practice assessment simulates the EPA well. Apprentices who fail the practice assessment are supported well by assessors to improve their skills and knowledge. They receive a detailed action plan on how to improve before the next mock assessment. This additional support ensures that all apprentices pass their EPA on time.

Leaders and managers monitor the performance of subcontractors effectively. They use a wide range of information to review the quality of the training offered, including the views of apprentices and observations of teaching, learning and assessment. As a result, they make changes where necessary to improve the curriculum and the quality of the training. For example, managers changed the start times of training so that apprentices avoid travelling on Sunday.

The large majority of apprentices have the English and mathematics skills they need to enable them to complete their training. Managers ensure that those who need additional help with their English and mathematics receive it. As a result, almost all apprentices develop the English and mathematics skills and knowledge they need to pass their functional skills tests first time.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that apprentices benefit from high-quality training that leads to positive outcomes for apprentices? Significant progress

Apprentices enjoy their training. A very high proportion of apprentices complete within the planned period and only a small minority do not complete their apprenticeship. Apprentices have good attendance to their training and work. All those who have completed their training have secured employment with the company.

Assessors and trainers are very experienced and well qualified. Through participating in a wide range of courses they keep up to date with current industry standards. They provide good support to apprentices during their training.

Apprentices benefit from a thorough initial assessment of their skills and knowledge. Managers use this well to build a comprehensive individual learning plan that informs off-the-job training for both technical skills and other skills necessary for work. For example, where an apprentice lacks confidence, assessors set a team presentation activity to help the apprentice develop their self-confidence. Assessors set apprentices targets that link well to the skills that apprentices need at work, such as punctuality and improving their fitness levels. This challenges apprentices to do their best, take pride in their achievements and achieve their learning goals.

Assessors review the progress that apprentices make frequently and diligently. As a result, apprentices know what progress they are making and what they need to do to improve further. This ensures that most apprentices are on track to complete their training by the planned end date. Assessors and instructors quickly identify apprentices who fall behind in their work. Through close monitoring and additional reviews, teaching and mentoring, apprentices catch up and swiftly get back on target to achieve within the planned timescale. Apprentices develop good skills, knowledge and behaviours to meet the requirements of the qualifications and to be effective in their jobs.

Assessors provide good and detailed feedback on the quality of apprentices' written work and identify any spelling or grammatical mistakes. In a very small minority cases, assessors accept weak assignments and do not acknowledge spelling or grammatical mistakes. As a result, a few apprentices do not improve their written English quickly enough.

Managers have identified that very few apprentices who complete their training achieve a distinction. However, managers are yet to implement action to improve the proportion of apprentices who do so.

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

Leaders and managers promote highly effectively a culture of safety to apprentices. They place a high priority on the health and safety of apprentices, other employees and the public. Since 2009, leaders and managers have significantly reduced the accident rate across the company, which are very low.

Leaders and managers provide effective oversight of safeguarding arrangements through a governance panel. Through the panel they review safeguarding incidents, the action taken and how well the welfare needs of individuals are met.

Managers and staff are suitably trained and alert to apprentices' welfare needs. They demonstrate professional curiosity if apprentices show changes of behaviour or their behaviour gives cause for concern. This leads to thorough investigation by staff and managers where there are safeguarding concerns. Where necessary, managers seek support from others, such as occupational health and counsellors, to ensure that apprentices receive the help that they need.

Managers and staff ensure that apprentices aged under 18 are suitably safeguarded, including during periods of block release when they stay in residential accommodation. Those aged under 18 years old stay in separate accommodation to adults and have 24-hour supervision. Managers ensure that all staff who work with apprentices aged under 18 years old are suitable to do so.

Managers have developed useful resources to promote safeguarding, such as credit-card-style notes that contain information on how to keep safe and who to contact should apprentices have concerns. Staff use very effective strategies to help apprentices consider a range of safeguarding issues, including radicalisation, extremism and abuse. As a result, apprentices develop well their understanding of British values and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

Apprentices feel safe. They know who to turn to at work and when training should they have any safeguarding concerns. Managers promote a confidential helpline should employees have concerns about issues such as bullying or harassment. UKPN operates a confidential whistle-blowing policy.

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