

Serco Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Serco Limited was inspected in March 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Themes

Have leaders and managers ensured that a large proportion of apprentices complete their qualification within the planned timescale? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have ensured that more apprentices are now completing their qualifications than at the time of the previous inspection. Managers' projections for this year and inspection evidence indicate a further slight increase in the number of apprentices achieving their qualification. However, a third of apprentices will not complete their qualifications within the time expected.

An improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of training is being used to bring about the improvements necessary. For example, managers have halted a three-year decline in achievement for apprentices studying sport and leisure by adjusting the recruitment criteria so that apprentices enrol on the correct course. They have empowered training and assessment officers (TAOs) to use technology effectively to support these apprentices to achieve more quickly.

The number of apprentices who withdraw from the programme early and do not complete their apprenticeships has reduced significantly. Senior leaders withdraw apprentices only after all options have been explored to support and re-engage them. Serco human resources managers ensure that apprentices who complete their qualifications receive appropriate incentives. This has had a positive impact on the proportion of apprentices who remain on their apprenticeships.

Effective strategies to monitor current apprentices' progress are enabling leaders and managers to intervene quickly and provide effective additional support when an apprentice falls behind. Leaders and managers have reduced the number of apprentices that each TAO supports to ensure that they have sufficient time to help and challenge all apprentices.

Have staff supported apprentices to understand the risks of radicalisation and extremist behaviours?

Reasonable progress

Leaders' and managers' strategies to address this area for improvement from the previous inspection are proving successful. They have increased TAOs' knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty by providing extra training and as a result TAOs develop apprentices' understanding more effectively. TAOs have made good progress in supporting apprentices, particularly those new to the programme, to understand the risks of radicalisation and extremist behaviours. However, apprentices approaching the end of their apprenticeships have less recall and understanding of the issues associated with 'Prevent'.

Most apprentices have sufficient understanding of the risks associated with extremism. They can discuss issues and know how to raise any concerns they might have. However, apprentices do not always link their knowledge to the specific potential threats within their workplace. For example, those who work on military bases were not able to identify the current threat level for the base or make connections between the 'Prevent' training they had undertaken and the security of their bases.

Apprentices undertake a range of additional e-learning modules linked to 'Prevent', safeguarding and British values. TAOs accurately record apprentices' completion of these modules. New apprentices can discuss the issues raised in these e-learning modules confidently. While apprentices who are training with a subcontractor have access to the 'Prevent' and British values e-learning modules, there is no record of this in their electronic portfolios and therefore managers are unable to make an assessment of their understanding.

Managers ensure that TAOs receive good training from external organisations on 'Prevent' and the Channel programme. As a result, TAOs have an improved understanding and ability to support and challenge apprentices on these topics. However, TAOs do not discuss current or relevant news events with apprentices during reviews and off-the-job training sessions and therefore fail to check their knowledge and understanding well enough.

Have leaders and managers implemented their plans to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and have they put appropriate checks in place to ensure that their actions are effective in raising standards?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers responded swiftly to the findings of the previous inspection and they have introduced a range of measures to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment for apprentices.

Managers' monitoring of TAOs' performance against a range of key performance indicators aimed at raising standards is effective. Managers' very clear focus on

challenging and supporting TAOs is developing their teaching and assessment practice. As a result, TAOs have improved their observation grades, and apprentices learn more from and enjoy their sessions.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have introduced a comprehensive programme of professional development for all staff to broaden their professional and vocational skills. Leaders have also prepared staff and workplace supervisors very well for the introduction of standards apprenticeships. This includes effective planning and implementation of off-the-job training, which apprentices record accurately in their electronic portfolios. Managers and TAOs ensure that all apprentices benefit from a well-run programme of study.

A comprehensive assessment of apprentices' vocational and academic skills is ensuring that all apprentices have a personal programme that is relevant to their individual needs and experience. This supports apprentices to develop appropriate new skills, knowledge and behaviours to meet the requirements of apprenticeships. Managers use effective diagnostic tools to produce a 'personalised learner journey' plan. This enables TAOs to understand apprentices' particular needs and abilities. TAOs can then support their apprentices in all aspects of their programme, including any additional learning needs they may have.

Leaders have recruited a learning support specialist to improve apprentices' written and oral communication. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this appointment on the standard of apprentices' English skills.

Have leaders and managers sufficient access to information to enable them to monitor the impact of improvements and plan further improvements?

Reasonable progress

Since the previous inspection, Serco senior leaders have undertaken a comprehensive review of apprenticeship provision within the organisation. A positive culture shift in valuing apprenticeships as an important part of Serco's workforce has taken place. Leaders have appointed skilled managers who have appropriate knowledge and experience in apprenticeships. Senior leaders hold these managers to account well and support them to continually improve all aspects of apprenticeship provision within Serco, including financial management. Leaders and managers can clearly articulate the improvements resulting from a further restructure of operational staff that took place five months ago. For example, managers have a more accurate picture of those apprentices due to complete within three months and have strategies in place to help them complete on time.

Data analysis, to improve the quality of training to apprentices, is now part of embedded practice. Leaders and managers can therefore deal effectively with any underperformance issues, within both the staff and the apprenticeship programme. Senior leaders and managers use their findings to plan interventions and ensure that appropriate staff are held to account for their actions. Managers monitor actions

appropriately to evaluate the impact on apprentices' experiences and review the progress of apprentices effectively.

An increased focus on achieving short-term targets to improve the performance of TAOs and workplace managers is ensuring that more apprentices are achieving their qualifications in a more timely manner. However, they have not yet developed an overarching apprenticeship strategy that clearly articulates their medium- and long-term plans for improvement.

Have leaders and managers ensured that all apprentices receive consistently good careers information and advice to enable them to plan their future careers effectively?

Significant progress

Apprentices receive good impartial, information, advice and guidance throughout their apprenticeship programme, including before they start and towards the end.

Apprentices complete a comprehensive careers and personal development review at enrolment. This review identifies apprentices' areas for development, their aspirations and individual learning goals. However, a few TAOs do not use this information consistently to inform apprentices' long-term targets.

The vast majority of apprentices indicate that their training prepares them very well to progress to the next stage of their career or learning. Many apprentices gain new skills and responsibilities. Most apprentices coming to the end of their apprenticeship have secured permanent employment and are clear about their future within Serco. For example, engineering apprentices will progress to 'fitter's mate' and after a further period of training and assessment to a 'fitter'.

TAOs complete 'next steps' reviews with apprentices as they approach the end of their programmes. These prepare individuals well to progress to the next stage in their career development. A high proportion of apprentices who complete their qualifications gain extra responsibilities or promotions within Serco.

Plans are in place for all TAOs to achieve information, advice and guidance qualifications, which will further ensure that apprentices are well supported throughout their programme.

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