

Technical Professionals 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.

Technical Professionals Limited (TPL) began training apprentices as a subcontractor in August 2017 and started training apprentices using levy funding in September 2017. Most apprentices are on bespoke standards-based programmes in project management and IT support services; 17 are studying at level 3, 65 at level 4, and five at level 5. There are 15 apprentices studying frameworks, most are on a level 3 programme. TPL offers apprenticeships nationwide through online training and direct delivery by trainer-assessors.

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 to provide training for levy-funded apprentices from levels 2 to 5, mainly in project management and IT support services. Staff have extensive specialist expertise in these vocational areas. Managers have developed appropriate bespoke programmes to meet the needs of employers and the requirements of apprenticeships.

All apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and understanding. TPL has started to prepare apprentices well for their end-point assessment. So far, two apprentices have successfully completed their programmes; one achieving their framework and another achieving their standard with distinction grades.

Leaders and managers have established highly effective links with employers. Employers choose to work with TPL because of their expertise in the technical and professional sectors and their niche apprenticeship provision. Through close working with employers, TPL managers identify apprentices' needs and deliver programmes that meet employers' requirements.

Leaders and managers are taking action to further improve the quality of their apprenticeships. They have recently recruited additional staff to reduce assessor caseloads.

Recruitment of apprentices is rigorous. Leaders and managers ensure that potential apprentices and employers fully understand the requirements of the apprenticeship programme, including apprentices' entitlement to receive time for off-the-job training. TPL no longer works with employers who are not committed to providing apprentices with their full entitlement to off-the-job training. As a result, retention of new learners is now high.

Leaders' and managers' use of data requires improvement. Managers do not have enough oversight of apprentices' progress. For example, a backlog in the marking of apprentices' submitted work meant that learners' progress is not correctly recorded. As a result, managers are unaware of which apprentices are making appropriate progress and which are falling behind. Hence, interventions from managers and trainer-assessors are not put in place swiftly enough to support any apprentices who are falling behind.

TPL managers carry out observations of staff delivering recruitment and training sessions as well as apprentices' reviews with their trainer-assessor. Too often, the outcomes from the observations of trainer-assessors' performance are not followed up with enough feedback and training to help them improve the quality of their teaching practices.

Senior leaders have not yet put in place adequate governance arrangements. In the absence of a governing board, the senior leadership team provide appropriate support and challenge for the training team and closely monitor the performance of the organisation in terms of outcomes for learners. Directors receive insufficient information on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Knowledge of the key strengths and weaknesses related to the quality of provision is invested in one manager and is not understood sufficiently by the two directors. As a result, senior leaders are unable to provide enough support and challenge or hold 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**

Planning of the apprenticeship curriculum is effective. Prior to enrolling, assessors discuss with prospective apprentices what they hope to achieve on completion of the programme. Assessors also discuss with employers how the apprenticeship will benefit their business. A bespoke apprenticeship programme is then developed with the apprentice and the employer. For example, apprentices on the network engineer apprenticeship complete the A+ qualification, a specialised industry-recognised qualification, to complement their learning programme. Trainer-assessors use their precise assessment of apprentices' current knowledge, skills and behaviours, and accurate identification of apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics, to plan programmes that meet apprentices' individual learning needs.

Trainer-assessors use training sessions and internet resources effectively to provide suitable training for apprentices. Apprentices develop good knowledge, skills and behaviours as part of their apprenticeship. They can contextualise how they use these skills in the workplace. For example, apprentices on level 4 project management programmes discuss how the late delivery of chocolate from Italy will impact on the production of chocolate bars during the Easter period and how this can be minimised.

Most apprentices now receive their full entitlement to off-the-job training. The electronic tracking system records precisely off-the-job training activities, the relevance to apprentices' job roles and the knowledge, skills and behaviours developed. Apprentices' work is at the standard expected for the apprenticeship. Apprentices are proud of their work. For example, apprentices on level 5 operations department manager programmes produced and delivered presentations about project management to a high standard. These were presented to colleagues on level 3 team leader apprenticeships. As a result, the level 5 apprentices developed their communication and presentation skills while the level 3 apprentices were challenged to work at a higher level.

The delivery of English and mathematics varies considerably between trainer-assessors, apprenticeship subjects and levels. Managers rightly recognise that the development of apprentices' English and mathematics requires improvement. They have not yet implemented an effective plan to eradicate these weaknesses.

Trainer-assessors do not assess quickly enough the work that apprentices submit via the electronic portfolio system. Many apprentices have submitted several pieces of work for which they have yet to receive feedback. As a result, apprentices do not know how to improve their work and the electronic portfolio system indicates that too many apprentices are making slow progress. Where feedback following assessment is given, the quality varies considerably. Not all assessors provide detailed and helpful feedback that supports apprentices to improve their work.

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

Safeguarding is effective. Safeguarding policies and protocols are updated regularly. Employers, staff and apprentices receive helpful 'quick reference guides' for safeguarding and understand to who they should report any safeguarding concerns.

All staff receive safeguarding training to level 2. Staff benefit from frequent safeguarding updates including updates on the 'Prevent' agenda. Apprentices, as part of their induction and during their programme, receive in-depth training on safeguarding. As a result, staff and apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding and the threats of radicalisation and extremism.

As part of progress reviews, assessors ask apprentices pertinent safeguarding questions relating to current themes and topics to develop and improve their understanding. For example, assessors and apprentices discuss the storyline of a popular television programme where a young person is groomed by an adult female character.

The appointed designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and her deputy hold suitable qualifications and undertake appropriate training with the local authority safeguarding board. Although there have been no safeguarding referrals to date, appropriate processes are in place for the reporting of safeguarding issues and concerns. Staff have a good understanding of the referral process.

Leaders and managers complete safer recruitment processes when employing staff. They check thoroughly prospective staff's suitability to work with apprentices to ensure that the staff they employ are safe to work with young people and vulnerable adults. All staff complete enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

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