

Ashley Community & Housing Ltd

Monitoring visit report

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

From March 2019, 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 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.

Ashley Community & Housing Ltd (ACH) was established in Bristol in 2008. It specialises in the economic, social and civic integration of refugees and newly arrived communities through providing accommodation and community-based training. ACH now operates in Bristol, Birmingham and Wolverhampton, where it delivers adult training as a subcontractor. It started delivering an apprenticeship contract in July 2018. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 14 apprentices enrolled on three different standards-based apprenticeship programmes. Five apprentices are on level 5 operations and departmental manager apprenticeships, three apprentices are on level 2 property maintenance operative apprenticeships and six apprentices are on level 3 gas engineering operative apprenticeships with a subcontractor in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Themes

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

Leaders and managers do not adequately monitor and review the quality of training, learning and assessment across the apprenticeship programmes. They do not have enough oversight of the quality of the subcontracted apprenticeships or identify where they need to make improvements. As a result, too many apprentices are not making strong progress in their development of new work-related skills, knowledge and behaviours. Apprentices are not prepared well enough in order to be successful at their final assessment.

In November 2018, leaders and managers started to introduce formal quality reviews but have been too slow in implementing identified improvements. Although members of the board have an adequate understanding of the improvements that ACH need to make, they do not challenge leaders and managers enough about the pace of their implementation. In addition, the use of internal and external observations of the quality of the training that apprentices receive is ineffective. Evaluations do not focus

sufficiently on apprentices' knowledge, skills development and progress. Feedback does not give trainers clear guidance on how to improve their practice further.

Training staff do not all maintain accurate records of apprentices' progress, including the amount of in-work and off-the-job training that apprentices are accessing. Consequently, leaders and managers do not have a sufficiently detailed and accurate overview of which apprentices are making appropriate progress and which are falling behind. As a result, leaders and managers do not know that all apprentices are getting enough time and training in order to complete their apprenticeship. For example, leaders and managers do not know enough about the quality of the level 3 off-the-job training with its subcontractor, because no current ACH managers or members of staff have visited this subcontractor.

Leaders and managers were slow to identify that the quality of the off-the-job training for level 5 apprentices was not of a good enough quality. As a result, level 5 apprentices are behind in their development of new knowledge and understanding. It will be challenging for apprentices to complete their apprenticeships within the planned time. Last month, ACH implemented new off-the-job training arrangements for these apprentices. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these changes.

Leaders, managers and training staff have insufficient oversight of the development of apprentices' English, mathematics and digital skills. Apprentices do not have enough opportunities to develop these skills during their training. Leaders and managers do not ensure that, where required, apprentices are being prepared well enough for functional skills examinations. Leaders and managers do not ensure that all apprentices receive adequate information, advice and guidance at their recruitment. As a result, retention is low and nearly a third of apprentices have already left the apprenticeship programmes.

Senior leaders identify a clear and well-thought-out strategy for the introduction of apprenticeships. This aligns well with ACH's overall mission and core values to work with refugees and people from minority ethnic groups, to enhance and develop their skills and to increase their progression opportunities.

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

Of the apprentices who remain on the apprenticeship programmes, around one third are making slow progress. Training staff do not ensure that the electronic portfolio tracking system is up-to-date. As a result, training staff and apprentices are not clear enough about apprentices' individual progress or what extra support any apprentices who are falling behind may require.

Most apprentices do not have formal reviews of their progress and development. In addition, training staff do not provide apprentices with enough detailed feedback on

how they can make better progress. Level 5 apprentices do not currently have enough tailored, individual support to enable them to accelerate their rate of progress.

The vast majority of apprentices' written work is not of a high enough standard. Apprentices at level 5 are producing work that does not always demonstrate enough in-depth knowledge of the operational and departmental manager subject matter, which is not preparing them well enough for further study. Apprentices at level 2 and 3 do not receive enough guidance on how they can raise the standard of their written work and improve their spelling and punctuation.

Apprentices all have an initial assessment to establish their starting points in English, mathematics and digital skills. However, training staff are not making enough use of this information to plan how to help apprentices to develop these important skills further. Training to support those apprentices who need to gain functional skills qualifications in English and mathematics has been slow to start.

ACH staff have developed good relationships with employers, who have a basic understanding of the progress that their apprentices are making. However, few apprentices have formal reviews. Therefore, ACH staff and employers do not get enough opportunities to plan coherent links between the on- and off-the job training, which slows apprentices' progress.

The vast majority of apprentices apply the skills they do develop well when in their workplaces. They work closely with their employers and develop new skills that enable them to become more effective employees. For example, apprentices on level 3 gas engineering operatives use their knowledge of gas regulations to safely test appliances such as boilers. As the employer, ACH's leaders and managers work closely with the level 5 apprentices to ensure that they work on challenging and unique work-related projects. This benefits the ACH organisation and its clients, as well as contributing significantly to the personal and professional development of these apprentices.

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

Leaders, managers and members of the board ensure that safeguarding has a high priority across the organisation, which they regularly review at senior management and board meetings. ACH has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place, including the appropriate checking and safer recruitment of new staff. They implement a strong focus on safeguarding throughout the recruitment process. All staff working with apprentices complete enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

Staff and board members have appropriate training in relation to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Most apprentices at levels 2 and 3 develop at least a basic

understanding in relation to keeping themselves safe from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. A 'Prevent' risk assessment and action plan helps ensure that apprentices at level 5 have a well-developed understanding in relation to the 'Prevent' duty. However, this does not currently identify any potential local threats to apprentices' well-being, in the contexts of where they live and work.

ACH apprentices receive helpful safeguarding information at induction and during their programmes. As a result, apprentices develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in their workplaces. They are clear how to report any safeguarding concerns and incidents. Managers carefully log these, follow them up appropriately and pay good attention to accurate reporting and record-keeping.

ACH staff network with other providers in order to share good practice in safeguarding and to keep up-to-date with key developments. Staff have strong links with a wide range of external agencies and professionals, as well as with the local authority where its headquarters are based. This ensures that they can access specialist information and support for apprentices, when required.

ACH's monitoring of the subcontractors' safeguarding arrangements at the beginning of their contract in November 2018 was not thorough enough. However, over the past three months, managers have ensured that these apprentices feel, and are, safe.

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