

Birmingham YMCA

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 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.

Birmingham YMCA is a not-for-profit organisation based in the West Midlands. In 2017, the organisation began training apprentices through the apprenticeship levy. It currently offers standards-based apprenticeships in housing and property management to nine adult apprentices. The majority of these apprentices are based in the West Midlands, with the remainder spread across both the East of England and the South East of England. Most apprentices are studying levels 3 and 4, with a small number of apprentices on level 2 courses. Apprentices study at the provider's Erdington training centre located in the north of Birmingham.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have a realistic vision for the organisation to be a provider of choice for apprentices to employers within the social housing sector. They make good use of their extensive expertise and long-standing reputation as a housing and social enterprise to plan carefully a sustainable curriculum in line with the organisation's charitable ethos, capacity and experience.

Leaders and managers make good use of their extensive contacts with employers to inform their curriculum strategy. Leaders and training staff work closely with employers to develop bespoke and individualised apprenticeship programmes. These support their employees to gain the skills they need to work within the housing and property sector.

Managers ensure that apprentices receive appropriate initial advice and guidance to place them on programmes that meet their needs and aspirations. Trainers carefully assess apprentices' job roles and existing skills to make sure that they are likely to benefit from the planned training.

Leaders and managers are careful that their provision complies with the principles of apprenticeships. They ensure that apprentices participate in and benefit from regular

high-quality off-the-job training. Leaders have ensured that employers understand and fulfil their contribution to training by providing mentoring and support that co-ordinate well with off-the-job training. As a result, most apprentices are well supported and benefit from a well-planned training schedule. They receive their full entitlement to all aspects of the curriculum.

All training staff involved with the delivery and assessment of the apprenticeship programme are suitably qualified, and all have considerable sector-specific experience in housing tenancy and property management. Just over half of the training team hold teaching qualifications. Trainers ensure that they keep their knowledge and practice of housing legislation and practice up to date. This enables them to develop apprentices' skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to the specific areas of tenancy management in which they work.

Leaders have invested in additional staffing and resources to support the development and delivery of the apprenticeship programme. For example, they have very recently invested in a new online portfolio system for the storage of apprentices' work and the records of their progress. However, managers' use of data does not always enable them to identify when apprentices are making slower than expected progress.

Since gaining a directly funded contract, the trustees have responded quickly by extending their scrutiny and oversight to encompass the apprenticeship programme. Membership of the board has been strengthened through the timely appointment of new members who have a wide range of experience and expertise, including post-16 education. Trustees provide effective challenge and hold leaders and managers to good account for the apprenticeship programmes.

Leaders and managers do not routinely assess the quality of teaching and learning. They place too much emphasis on assessment and internal verification arrangements to assure themselves of the quality and standards of the apprenticeship programme. Leaders have recognised the need to have a more comprehensive overview of the quality of teaching, but the planned lesson observation process is not yet in place.

Leaders have yet to develop a quality improvement strategy that will help them understand fully the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship programme. In a few cases, managers have been too slow to introduce interventions that support apprentices to make the progress expected of them.

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**

Apprentices enjoy their programme. They are highly motivated and engage quickly in their learning. They develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours relevant to their specific job roles. Learners receive regular off-the-job training, which has been

planned effectively around their individual needs. Apprentices benefit also from attending a broad range of internal training specific to their employers' business. For example, apprentices attend training updates on how to deal with potential anti-social behaviour of tenants. Apprentices benefit from other relevant training, including briefing and updates on the latest legislative requirements associated with the management of tenure and lettings.

Trainers make good use of information gathered about the starting points of their apprentices to plan individualised programmes which focus on each apprentice's specific development needs. Trainers use the results arising from vocational skills scans and baseline assessments to make sure that apprentices start the programme at the most appropriate point. Trainers ensure that apprentices complete learning and work that is new and relevant, and which prepares them for their next steps and careers.

Apprentices successfully apply the new knowledge and skills learned on the programme into their workplace for the benefit of the employers and tenants. For example, level 3 apprentices successfully extend their knowledge of how to identify the indicators that a tenant may be at risk of falling into arrears with their rent.

Managers and trainers provide apprentices with good support. Apprentices are ambitious and have positive attitudes to work and study, they are well prepared for enhanced roles and promoted positions at work. Their attendance, both at work and at planned training sessions, is good.

All apprentices have good skills in English and mathematics as a requirement of their job role, and most successfully apply these essential skills within their work context. However, trainers do not routinely plan how to extend and develop apprentices' mathematical and English skills beyond their initial starting points.

Trainers provide apprentices with informative and detailed training and assessment schedules. As a result, most apprentices have a secure and well-informed understanding of what they need to do, and by when, to complete their training assessments. The standard of apprentices' work routinely meets the requirements for the qualification. A minority of apprentices do not know that they can gain high grades and so do not seek to achieve beyond the minimum pass grade in their course assignments.

The large majority of apprentices, particularly those studying at level 4, make good progress towards completing their qualifications by the planned end date. In contrast, the small minority of apprentices at levels 2 and 3 make slow progress on their programme compared to their peers. Trainers do not review these apprentices' progress frequently enough, and assessment feedback is not recorded well enough to help them understand what they need to do to improve.

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

Leaders, managers and staff maintain safeguarding arrangements that successfully promote apprentices' safety, health and well-being. Leaders ensure that appropriate policies and procedures are in place that cover key aspects of safe practice, with clear lines of responsibility and reporting. All staff receive appropriate training in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty.

The designated safeguarding officer (DSO) is suitably trained for the role and has undertaken wider additional training to enhance their knowledge about issues such as forced marriages, online safety and child sexual exploitation. The DSO maintains a good range of links with specialist bodies and external agencies.

Leaders maintain a frequently updated and accurate single central record on the checks made on new staff during recruitment. They ensure that appropriate checks are undertaken for all staff involved with the training of apprentices, both to confirm their right to work and assure their suitability to work with apprentices.

Leaders and managers ensure that detailed and informative safeguarding and health and safety checks are carried out at employers' premises before apprentices are signed up to programmes. Where potential risks are identified through workplace checks, managers make sure that appropriate actions plans are quickly put into place and closely monitored.

All apprentices work in a safe and caring environment where their well-being is a priority. Trainers and employers work cooperatively to make certain apprentices have a secure understanding of how to assure their own safety and well-being while working with clients who may be vulnerable and experiencing crises. For example, apprentices have undertaken additional courses to develop their skills as mental health first aiders. Apprentices receive more specialist training in how to spot the signs that may indicate that tenants are at risk. This includes the risks of domestic abuse, of becoming victims of exploitation, or of individuals using the tenancy for a range of potentially illegal purposes. Managers respond effectively to reported incidents and make referrals to external agencies when required.

Staff ensure that apprentices have an appropriate level of understanding of the risks associated with being online and using social media, and the dangers of online radicalisation from those supporting extremist ideas. However, the very recently developed 'Prevent' policy is too generalised and does not contain a 'Prevent' risk assessment or action plan setting out the company's response to particular local threats and vulnerabilities.

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