

Western Power Distribution (South West)

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Employer

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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 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.

Western Power Distribution (WPD) is the largest electricity distribution network operator in the United Kingdom. They have training centres based in the West Midlands and South West regions. Apprentices are based across the East and West Midlands and South West regions of England. As an employer provider they are delivering standards-based apprenticeships at level 3, and 4. Most level 3 craft apprentices are employed fitters, jointers and linespersons looking after underground cables, overhead lines and substations. The small number of level 4 apprentices are employed as electrical power network engineers. Some 110 apprentices are currently in learning. The organisation subcontracts the technical certificate training to Stephenson's College and Aston University.

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 developed a clear training strategy for the company. Leaders and managers are successfully developing a high-quality and well-planned apprenticeship programme. The programme addresses the skills shortages within the electricity and power industry. As a result, managers are recruiting and training a competent workforce to meet their needs as an employer.

Leaders and managers have built solidly on their expertise within the industry to deliver standards-based apprenticeships. Managers and trainers have extensive experience in delivering training in the electricity distribution industry. Distribution and team managers, as well as workplace mentors, provide most apprentices with good support in the workplace.

Managers have improved the skills of trainers to implement the apprenticeship programme. All trainers have teaching qualifications. Trainers maintain their vocational expertise through regular industry updating. Workplace mentors have

received training to undertake their role in supporting apprentices in the workplace. Apprentices benefit from the support they receive through their training and in the workplace.

Managers have implemented a well-planned off-the-job training programme. When the programme started, apprentices completed their theory sessions through online learning. Apprentices were not able to apply the skills learned in theory sessions to the workplace. Managers acted on the feedback they received from apprentices to improve the training. Off-the-job training is now delivered through taught sessions. Following the changes managers have made, the large majority of apprentices are able to apply the skills and knowledge learned into the workplace.

Managers and trainers closely track the progress of individual apprentices. The majority of apprentices are making expected or better progress on their programme. The proportion of apprentices staying in learning is high.

Managers and staff meet monthly, and this is the main mechanism for improving the quality of provision. Senior leaders acknowledge that they need to improve their oversight of the apprenticeship programme. Senior leaders and directors have identified the need to put in place regular reporting for the scrutiny of directors. Managers do not currently provide summary reports on the progress of apprentices, or the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders have identified the need to hold managers to account for the programme and are seeking external support to enable this.

Managers accurately assess the performance of trainers through their evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment. However, managers do not use the information they gain well enough to drive improvements. As a result, a minority of trainers do not improve their practice.

Managers have completed a self-assessment and quality improvement plan. However, they have not identified clearly enough the actions needed to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

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

Managers undertake rigorous recruitment processes for applicants to the apprenticeship programme. Managers place apprentices on the right level of programme. The large majority of apprentices are new to the industry. Managers recruit a small minority of apprentices with previous experience of working in the domestic electrical industry. Apprentices demonstrate that they have learned new skills, knowledge and behaviours by working effectively in a live power network workplace.

Apprentices benefit from good advice and guidance throughout their programme. Trainers and mentors provide detailed advice during review meetings. Managers provide careers information through notice boards and online job vacancies. Most managers have previously worked as apprentices at WPD. They act as good role models for apprentices and demonstrate career progression in the workplace.

Apprentices develop good practical skills and technical knowledge. Mentors work closely with line managers to ensure that apprentices develop the skills and knowledge to do their jobs. Managers give apprentices good levels of responsibility to complete important tasks. Level 3 craft apprentices learn how to complete joints on a wide range of cable types to enable them to work on live cables. Apprentices quickly become valued and productive members of their teams.

The majority of trainers regularly update managers on the progress that apprentices make on their on- and off-the-job training. Managers plan work tasks to enable apprentices to practise the skills they have learned in their off-the-job training. As a result, the majority of apprentices rapidly become competent in completing important and complex jobs at work.

A few managers and trainers do not plan sufficient practice for apprentices to become confident in the skills they have learned in off-the-job training. Apprentices are required to become competent in a small number of skills that are not covered in routine job tasks. For example, apprentices do not have enough practice in tower work. As a result, apprentices are not confident in completing these tasks.

Apprentices demonstrate high standards of professional behaviours at work. They improve their customer service and understanding of working with the public. Most apprentices know how well they are progressing on their programme. Trainers set action plans for apprentices who are at risk of falling behind. Apprentices quickly get back on track on their programme. The majority of apprentices are on target to achieve by their planned end date.

Managers and trainers set clear milestones throughout the programme. The assessment of apprentices' progress considers feedback from line managers and mentors. As a result, level 3 apprentices make good progress on their programme. However, trainers do not provide apprentices with enough feedback on what they need to do to improve and achieve higher grades.

All apprentices undertake an assessment of their English and mathematics skills at the start of their programme. Trainers use the information on apprentices' starting points to ensure that they continue to improve their skills. Apprentices improve their skills through writing detailed job reports and completing calculations and measurements in daily tasks.

Managers and trainers do not provide enough support for the small minority of level 4 apprentices. Managers have not ensured that training matches closely enough the job roles of apprentices.

Apprentices do not have enough time for their off-the-job training. Apprentices are not trained well enough in specific technical tasks. As a result, apprentices are not confident in completing technical tasks and are making slow progress.

Managers and trainers have not ensured that apprentices have a detailed understanding of end-point assessment. Mentors are unaware that apprentices can achieve high grades. Trainers have not set targets to ensure that apprentices can achieve at the level of which they are capable. Most apprentices are not aware of the grades they can achieve at end-point assessment.

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

Managers have put in place an appropriate safeguarding policy which includes the 'Prevent' duty. Managers and trainers have completed safeguarding awareness training. Staff understand how to identify and report their concerns.

Senior leaders and managers carry out safer recruitment and selection procedures when recruiting staff. Managers maintain an appropriate single central register. All staff have had Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

The designated safeguarding officer and deputy designated safeguarding officer have completed appropriate training. Managers liaise well with external agencies and use the information they receive on local risks to inform their safeguarding policy and action plan.

Apprentices receive information on safeguarding, the 'Prevent' duty and British values during induction. Apprentices know to whom to report their concerns. They do not have a sufficiently detailed understanding of the risks posed to them from extremism and radicalisation at work and in their daily lives.

WPD has very high standards of health and safety in the workplace. Apprentices follow strict safe working practices. They always wear appropriate personal protective equipment on site. Managers and trainers model safe working in live electricity environments, including in training sessions. As a result, apprentices know how to keep themselves, their colleagues and the public safe.

Managers provide regular and detailed reports on health and safety management and incidents involving staff and apprentices to directors. Managers do not yet provide regular reports on safeguarding to directors, or any welfare or safeguarding incidents, to assure themselves that they meet with their legislative duties.

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