

Vocational Skills Solutions Limited

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 the Education and Skills Funding Agency (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.

Vocational Skills Solutions Limited (VSS) was established in 2012. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 111 apprentices. Of these, 78 were on standards-based apprenticeships and 33 were on apprenticeship frameworks. Sixteen apprentices were on level 2, 57 on level 3, two on level 4, and 27 on level 5. The nine apprentices at level 7 were out of scope for this monitoring visit. VSS provides training in a large number of vocational areas. The largest of these are leader adult care worker, leadership and management in health and social care, residential care, and team leader. Fifty-three learners were on adult learning programmes.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders select employers carefully. They ensure that employers provide high-quality on-the-job training and that apprentices receive good vocational and personal support from their employers. Leaders and managers recruit apprentices with integrity.

Leaders and managers manage assessors effectively. They require assessors to provide a high standard of training and assessment to apprentices. However, leaders and managers have recently identified correctly that a small number of assessors do not provide the consistently high quality of training and assessment that they require. They have taken immediate action to rectify this weakness, which they are monitoring closely.

Leaders have made a number of middle-management appointments recently to strengthen the apprenticeship provision. For example, they have appointed a new quality manager and a compliance officer. These members of staff are working very effectively to raise the quality of training. For example, the compliance officer ensures systematically that the provision complies with the apprenticeship principles

and requirements. The quality manager observes training and holds standardisation meetings. They provide helpful reports to leaders and managers.

Leaders and managers make sure that end-point assessments are in place as soon as possible. Apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships have a good understanding of end-point assessment requirements. Many apprentices are aiming for a distinction.

Leaders and managers have a good awareness of the progress that apprentices make. They know which apprentices do not make their expected progress. Leaders and managers have put actions in place recently to help apprentices who do not make the required progress to catch up as quickly as possible. It is too soon to judge the impact of their actions.

Leaders' governance arrangements are weak. Although senior leaders and managers challenge and support each other effectively, they have no external oversight. For example, no one holds leaders and managers to account for their use of resources and the quality of training they provide.

Leaders and managers do not check the quality and standard of apprentices' written work. For example, a small minority of apprentices at levels 3, 4 and 5 produce work that is at too low a standard for their level of apprenticeship. Additionally, a small minority of apprentices submit written work that is untidy and poorly presented. Leaders and managers have not identified these weaknesses.

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

Assessors meet apprentices and their employers before apprentices begin their apprenticeship. This is to set clear expectations and assess their commitment to the programme. This ensures that apprentices enrol on the correct apprenticeship programme. Apprentices receive an effective induction.

Apprentices develop substantial new vocationally related knowledge, skills and behaviours. They make very good use of these in their work. Employers value highly apprentices' contribution to their business. For example, apprentices communicate effectively and build professional relationships with customers and external agencies. Apprentices enhance their digital knowledge and skills through effective use of the electronic portfolio and frequent use of search engines for online research.

Assessors communicate frequently and effectively with employers, workplace managers and mentors. Assessors make sure they are aware of the learning and development that apprentices need to complete in their workplace. Consequently, most apprentices make their expected progress.

Apprentices enjoy their programmes. They are right to speak highly of the support their assessors provide. Apprentices also receive good support from their employers. For example, they work closely with workplace mentors who have the relevant knowledge, skills and experience. As a result, apprentices' self-confidence and workplace efficiency increase considerably. Most apprentices complete their work tasks to a high standard.

Assessors do not make full use of apprentices' identified vocational starting points to plan an individualised learning programme for each apprentice. They do not set apprentices targets that are sufficiently demanding. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices do not reach the high standards of which they are capable.

Assessors determine apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics systematically. However, they place insufficient importance on the need to diagnose apprentices' weaknesses in English and mathematics in depth. Consequently, apprentices do not eliminate these weaknesses quickly enough.

What progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that learners benefit from high-quality adult education that prepares them well for their intended job role, career aims and/or personal goals? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers provide good learning opportunities for adults, many of whom are long-term unemployed and/or have significant barriers to learning. They plan courses appropriately so that learners develop the knowledge and skills they need to move on to work or further learning. For example, in mathematics lessons learners learn the names of different shapes precisely. They also measure their areas accurately.

Assessors help learners to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. Learners are very positive about their experience and talk confidently about the knowledge and skills they gain. For example, they have a good understanding of health and safety and how they apply at work. Learners collaborate effectively and take pride in their work.

Learners on the warehousing and forklift truck course attend regularly. They learn relevant knowledge and skills and make good progress in relation to their starting points. Learners who complete the course receive further highly relevant training and obtain the forklift truck licence which helps them to gain employment.

Leaders and managers have developed good working relationships with employers that benefit learners. For example, learners who complete a five-week training course in housekeeping have the guarantee of a job interview by an employer. Learners who are successful at interview receive a job offer.

A small minority of learners do not receive sufficient information, advice and guidance before they enrol on a course. For example, a group of learners do not understand why they have to study English before they can learn about housekeeping. However, managers have reviewed their recruitment processes to ensure that learners receive relevant information, advice and guidance before they join a course.

Assessors do not routinely plan lessons to meet individual learners' needs. Assessors set learners the same work to complete irrespective of their starting points and abilities. Consequently, too many learners do not make the rapid progress of which they are capable.

Assessors mark work and provide positive feedback to learners. However, they do not always provide specific guidance to help learners improve their work. In too many instances, assessors do not provide learners with sufficient guidance on how to improve their written English.

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

Leaders and managers place a high priority on safeguarding apprentices and learners. Their safeguarding arrangements are effective. They have a comprehensive range of safeguarding policies and procedures which they implement effectively when safeguarding and safeguarding-related incidents arise.

The designated safeguarding officer (DSO) has considerable experience of dealing with a wide range of complex safeguarding and safeguarding-related issues. The DSO and deputy DSO are appropriately qualified. They have a good knowledge of relevant external agencies that they use when apprentices and learners require specialist support. The DSO follows up reported cases efficiently and monitors them frequently until they are resolved.

Leaders and managers practise safer recruitment when they employ new staff. For example, they obtain appropriate references, check applicants' suitability for working with apprentices and learners, and verify their residential status.

New members of staff have a good introduction to VSS's approach to safeguarding during their induction. All staff receive appropriate update training annually. Assessors' understanding of how to respond to apprentices' and learners' disclosures of safeguarding and safeguarding-related concerns is good.

Apprentices who work in adult-care and childcare settings have a good knowledge of safeguarding related to their jobs. Most of the other apprentices and learners have, at best, only a basic knowledge of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

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