

Performance Learning Group Ltd

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.

Performance Learning Group Ltd (PLG) was formed in June 2015. The company designs and delivers skills-development programmes for employers in the hospitality sector. PLG was awarded a contract to deliver apprenticeships in May 2017. At the time of the monitoring visit, 73 apprentices were in learning. Two apprentices were enrolled on a cleaning framework apprenticeship at level 2 and the remainder were on standards-based apprenticeships. These include business administration, cleaning, customer service, hospitality team member and hospitality management. Apprenticeships range from level 2 to level 4.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders plan programmes meticulously with employers to meet the apprenticeship requirements and the specific business needs of individual employers. For example, they developed a production chef apprenticeship at level 2 to assist staff in overseeing food produced in restaurants of several employers. They provide a hospitality manager apprenticeship at level 4 as part of an employer's fast-track programme to develop staff to become general managers.

Trainers are knowledgeable, skilled, well qualified and experienced. Apprentices have access to a useful online learning platform which contains resources and guidance tailored to employers' businesses training requirements. These resources help apprentices to apply their learning to their own organisations effectively.

Employers are clear about the benefits they gain from PLG's apprenticeship programmes. They say correctly that retention of apprentices is high in comparison with retention of other staff. This is a major benefit in an industry where staff frequently change their jobs. Employers value the way that trainers develop apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours in line with their business strategies, ethos and values. Trainers focus on those areas of most significance to employers,

such as teamworking skills and team-leadership skills, in addition to meeting the requirements of the apprenticeship programme.

Leaders track apprentices' progress very thoroughly. They undertake regular, detailed analyses and promptly identify apprentices who are at risk of not progressing in line with expectations. They identify and put in place effective support for these apprentices through frequent discussions with individual trainers and with employers. As a result, all apprentices who have so far completed their apprenticeship have done so by their planned end date.

Governors are effective. They use the detailed monthly reports they receive to carefully monitor apprentices' progress, plans for new apprenticeship programmes and current and future financial positions. They challenge and support leaders effectively. An independent board member with significant levels of relevant knowledge and experience has recently been appointed to strengthen further the expertise of the board.

Leaders accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeship provision. Their actions to address the weaknesses have a positive impact. For example, leaders' actions to improve apprentices' development of English and mathematical knowledge and skills have resulted in a significant improvement in first-time pass rates in functional skills tests. Leaders' observations of teaching, learning and assessment focus appropriately on the impact of teaching on apprentices' learning and progress. They identify correctly the areas for development. Leaders monitor progress towards eliminating these weaknesses in their monthly meetings with trainers.

Inspectors found that some apprentices were unable to take 20% of their working hours for off-the-job training due to the busy trading patterns in their outlets. As a result, they had to complete their apprenticeship work in their own time. A few apprentices are unclear about what counts towards their off-the-job training other than group training sessions and monthly visits by their trainer. Trainers do not calculate apprentices' off-the-job hours accurately; they estimate the hours completed from discussions with their apprentices.

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

Trainers provide high-quality training and coaching to apprentices. As a result, apprentices make good progress in developing substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours. For example, following skilful coaching by their trainer apprentices have a different perspective on their menus. They recognise how they can improve them. Trainers make good use of workplace resources, such as employers' policies,

procedures and business processes, and specialist workplace language. As a result, apprentices understand how to use their new skills at work.

Apprentices' new knowledge, skills and behaviours help them to work more efficiently. For example, apprentices can now carry out kitchen audits and health and safety checks on kitchens. Other apprentices use their new knowledge and skills to direct and support the teams they lead more effectively.

Apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they require for their future careers. For example, apprentices on the hospitality manager apprenticeship at level 4 gain the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress quickly to the role of general manager. Apprentices develop relevant knowledge and skills such as forecasting and how to calculate profit and loss.

Apprentices benefit from regular and very thorough reviews of their current progress with their trainers. With support from their trainers, apprentices identify clear developmental targets. For example, apprentices' targets include their personal and behavioural development and the development of their vocational, English and mathematical knowledge and skills. Apprentices' progress review records give a clear and comprehensive summary of the discussions and the targets that are agreed.

Most apprentices have a good understanding of end-point assessment requirements. They feel confident, and inspectors agree that they are prepared fully, having completed project work and a range of mock assessments. The first cohort of 17 apprentices to complete their apprenticeship since PLG acquired a direct-funding contract achieved good outcomes, with 69% achieving an overall distinction.

Trainers make very good use of audio and video evidence to capture apprentices' progress and development. However, they give insufficient feedback to apprentices on their work for apprentices to understand clearly how to improve it further to achieve a distinction.

Apprentices develop further their English and mathematical knowledge and skills through the apprenticeship programme. They receive effective support to gain functional skills qualifications to at least the level required for their apprenticeship, while a few achieve higher levels. A small minority of current apprentices are developing their English and mathematical knowledge and skills late in their apprenticeship. As a result, they are at risk of not achieving their functional skills qualifications in time to complete their apprenticeship by the planned end date. Apprentices do not develop their digital skills sufficiently.

Trainers do not discuss and validate the outcomes of apprentices' initial skills scans with their line managers. They do not use the detailed information gained from the skills scans well enough to plan individualised training for their apprentices.

Trainers do not involve apprentices' supervisors in all progress reviews. Consequently, too many supervisors are not aware of the current progress their

apprentices are making. Trainers do not routinely discuss with line managers the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices need to develop and consolidate. They do not check that line managers agree that apprentices are competent enough to achieve high grades.

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

Leaders place a high priority on safeguarding. They ensure that appropriate health and safety checks are carried out in apprentices' workplaces. Apprentices feel safe in their learning and work. They receive relevant training in how to stay safe and about the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism. They have a good awareness and understanding of these topics.

Governors oversee safeguarding arrangements effectively. They review regularly and approve relevant and appropriate policies and procedures. They ensure that new staff are recruited through safe-recruitment practices. Most staff have completed successfully safe-recruitment training.

The designated safeguarding officer is suitably qualified and knowledgeable. Leaders ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to manage disclosures. All staff receive relevant update training annually on safeguarding matters and current concerns relating to the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have strong links with external, specialist agencies. For example, a regional 'Prevent' coordinator has recently and comprehensively updated all staff about key regional threats. This is very helpful to trainers, who now discuss the regional threats with apprentices.

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