

# The Academy Hub Limited

Monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1278662

**Name of lead inspector:** Victor Reid, Her Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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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.

The Academy Hub Limited was established in 2014, offering a range of commercial training and consultancy services to the sales and recruitment sectors. In March 2017, the company was admitted to the register of apprenticeship training providers. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 57 apprentices funded through the levy across a wide geographical area. All apprentices are aged 19 and over. The vast majority are on standards-based apprenticeships at levels 2, 3, 4 and 5 in a range of vocational pathways. These include recruitment, customer service, team leading, and operational management. Five apprentices are studying towards a level 3 apprenticeship framework in sales.

### Themes

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

#### **Insufficient progress**

Leaders have not fully understood the requirements of an apprenticeship programme, nor do they understand how to implement and deliver apprenticeship courses successfully. A significant minority of apprentices do not receive their minimum entitlement to off-the-job training. Employers routinely require their apprentices to undertake structured learning in their own time. Levy-funded programmes do not meet the principles of an apprenticeship.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that apprentices benefit from adequate standards in teaching, learning and assessment. The arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are ineffective. Managers do not routinely observe sessions and are therefore unaware that most apprentices' experience of learning is of poor quality and fails to meet their needs. A significant majority of apprentices make slow progress and are highly unlikely to achieve their qualifications within planned timescales.

The management of staff performance is weak. Although most trainers are appropriately experienced for the course on which they teach, managers do not monitor their performance closely enough. Leaders do not set improvement targets or provide suitable professional development for trainers to help them raise the standard of their teaching to meet the needs of apprentices.

Leaders' analysis and use of management information to monitor the operational performance of the apprentices' programme are poor. The data reports managers present to leaders are often contradictory or inaccurate. Leaders therefore lack timely and accurate data on all aspects of apprentices' programmes. This hinders their efforts to identify issues and take effective action to make improvements.

Quality assurance arrangements are incomplete and insufficiently robust. Leaders and managers have not taken effective or swift action to improve the provision. They have not appropriately investigated or swiftly tackled the key causes of unacceptably high non-completion rates for apprentices. Leaders have not targeted sufficiently their quality improvement plans on those areas where improvements are most needed. Leaders do not routinely update the improvement plan and are unable to demonstrate the impact of any actions that they have taken.

The self-assessment report is neither analytical nor self-critical in its approach to evaluating the provision. Leaders have an inaccurate picture of the progress that apprentices make. This stops them judging how well the organisation is performing. Most judgements in the self-assessment report are over-generous and do not reflect the poor-quality learning experienced by many apprentices. The report does not identify most of the weaknesses found by inspectors.

Leaders and senior managers define the strategic aims of the organisation effectively and link these well to regional and national skills priorities.

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

Leaders and managers give insufficient consideration to apprentices' prior knowledge, experience and existing qualifications during the recruitment process. As a result, the large majority of apprentices do not develop substantial new skills or acquire new knowledge during their course.

Initial advice and guidance for most apprentices are poor. Consequently, learners find that their programmes are either too challenging or not challenging enough. For example, some apprentices with relevant degrees are placed on level 2 apprenticeships, and others who have already achieved lower-level qualifications do not have this taken into account as they move into higher-level apprenticeships.

Most apprentices are not making the progress required to achieve in line with their planned course completion date. Many apprentices are well behind where they should be for the length of time they have been on their programme. In some cases, this is due to a high turnover of training staff and long periods without any structured training taking place. Few employers are routinely involved in planning their apprentices' training.

Leaders and managers have been too slow to implement the English and mathematics requirements of the apprenticeship programme. Though almost all apprentices have completed initial assessments in these key subjects, they have not benefited from regular opportunities to develop or extend their skills. Apprentices who are required to undertake functional skills qualifications do not receive sufficient, timely support to enable them to gain these essential skills.

Leaders' internal tracking of apprentices' progress is insufficiently evaluative or accurate. As a result, managers are unaware of the significant number of apprentices who require additional interventions and support to enable them to catch up. Most apprentices are not sufficiently prepared for endpoint assessment. The large majority of apprentices do not have a secure or well-developed understanding of the requirements to achieve high grades in their assessed work.

Trainers do not routinely provide apprentices with sharply focused and detailed feedback regarding the development of their vocational skills, knowledge and behaviours throughout their programme. Most apprentices are set task-based targets that do not support them to make good progress.

Apprentices benefit from the support that the newly appointed trainers are offering them, and their most recent experience on the programme has significantly improved. Apprentices demonstrate a secure understanding of equality and diversity and British values. They successfully apply this to the workplace and in their personal lives.

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

Arrangements for safeguarding learners are ineffective. Leaders do not meet the statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices. Leaders were unable to demonstrate that the designated safeguarding officer (DSO) was suitably trained for this key role. The DSO did additional safeguarding training during the monitoring visit, but this was not at a level commensurate with their specific role.

Leaders do not systematically undertake workplace health and safety vetting assessments to assure themselves of the effectiveness of employers' arrangements designed to keep apprentices safe.

For example, leaders were not able to provide inspectors with copies of workplace health and safety vetting records for selected employers during the monitoring visit. This is a significant management failing.

Managers and trainers do not make enough use of reviews to reinforce apprentices' understanding of safeguarding, or to encourage apprentices to recognise potential safeguarding issues themselves. Although the programme handbooks provide apprentices with a range of helpful and pertinent information, they make no reference to the company's safeguarding policy. Most apprentices are unaware of who the DSO is, or how they can raise a safeguarding or welfare concern if they feel unsafe.

Leaders do not provide apprentices with suitable internet safety training to help them keep themselves safe online. Health and safety and safeguarding policies are broadly fit for purpose, but leaders have not established an e-safety policy.

Links with local safeguarding agencies and partners are poor. For example, leaders are unaware of the local vulnerabilities in the different geographical areas in which apprentices are based and how these should be reflected in a range of operational procedures. The company's 'Prevent' duty policy is informative but contains no action plan outlining how leaders intend to assure and develop their response to keeping apprentices safe from the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Leaders apply safe recruitment procedures for all staff involved with the apprenticeship. Managers ensure that they undertake Disclosure and Barring Service checks to ensure trainers' suitability to work unsupervised with young people and vulnerable adults. Managers ensure that trainers have completed appropriate training in both safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty.

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