

RPC Containers Limited

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 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.

RPC Containers Limited is part of the RPC Group, which manufactures plastic containers for a variety of purposes. At the time of the monitoring visit, it had nine apprentices. Four apprentices were undertaking the level 3 engineering technician standard (Machinist – Advanced Manufacturing Engineering strand) with the remaining five undertaking the level 2 science manufacturing process operative standard.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Both programmes fully meet the requirements of apprenticeships. Apprentices participate in well-planned and extensive on- and off-the-job training that often far exceeds minimum requirements and equips apprentices with the skills and knowledge they require to be successful in their workplaces. Current first year engineering apprentices are well prepared for their upcoming foundation phase assessments. Manufacturing apprentices are about to complete their end-point assessments, of which they have a clear understanding.

All apprentices work for RPC. Line managers support apprentices well to develop their skills, knowledge and behaviours in the workplace. They plan work activities that help apprentices to practise what they have learned in their off-the-job lessons. The apprenticeship team provides useful information to line managers about what apprentices have learned and how well they are progressing. They do this through monthly steering group meetings and progress reports for individual apprentices. This helps to ensure that line managers know what apprentices need to do to develop their skills further. However, line managers do not participate in their apprentices' progress reviews, and this limits the extent to which they can contribute to the apprentices' overall programme of learning.

Staff recruit apprentices who will benefit fully from the apprenticeship programme. They recruit most apprentices from outside of the company. Two of the current apprentices were selected from existing employees. These two apprentices had been working in elementary operator roles prior to becoming apprentices. Their

apprenticeship role requires them to develop considerable new expertise and take on new responsibilities. Managers expect apprentices to receive increased responsibility and pay as they progress, and that they will remain in full-time jobs on successful completion of their programmes.

Arrangements for oversight of the apprenticeship programme are not fully developed. The group human resources manager provides some support and challenge to the steering group, but her role is principally operational. The apprenticeship team may benefit from further external scrutiny and support.

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

All apprentices develop an extensive range of new, occupationally specific knowledge, skills and behaviours. They can clearly describe what they have learned and how this is applied in their jobs. They understand and display the professional behaviours expected. The quality of their written and practical work is good. Apprentices, several of whom are very young, grow in maturity and confidence.

Apprentices train in well-equipped specialist workshops and on the factory floor. Training staff are appropriately qualified and skilled. They have considerable experience of the apprentices' job roles, and several have teaching and training qualifications.

Current level 3 engineering apprentices are all in their first year of study. They benefit from three days per week of well-planned off-the-job training at RPC's academy at Oakham. They spend the other two days in the workplace completing tasks that are aligned well with their off-the-job study. Level 2 manufacturing apprentices receive at least one day per week of good-quality off-the-job training which is complemented by carefully selected workplace activities. Staff provide apprentices with helpful feedback about their work that apprentices use to improve their performance.

Almost all apprentices have the necessary English and mathematics qualifications when they begin their programmes. Staff assess apprentices' level of expertise in these subjects before they join their programmes, and where apprentices display any weaknesses, staff support them to improve through online resources and one-to-one tuition.

Quality assurance processes are basic, but appropriate for the scale of the programme. Staff observe each other's teaching, monitor apprentices progress, gather feedback from apprentices, and every six months produce an assessment of the programme's performance. This self-assessment identifies several improvement actions, but several of the judgements made in the most recent report lack clarity and, as a result, the corresponding improvement actions are unhelpful. However, this has had little impact on the quality of programmes.

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

Managers take their safeguarding responsibilities seriously. Apprentices are safe and feel safe. Training staff provide lessons on a range of topics that help apprentices to maintain their health, safety and wellbeing. Apprentices develop an understanding of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. They know whom they should contact if they have any safeguarding concerns.

The safeguarding policy is adequate. It provides information on safer recruitment of staff, how to deal with a safeguarding concern and some basic guidance on dealing with disclosures. However, it is not detailed and does not include guidance on a number of topics such as record-keeping, allegations against staff, or radicalisation.

Managers follow safer recruitment practices for apprenticeship training staff. Staff members are subject to a suitable range of pre-employment checks, including enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

Apprenticeship staff have all undergone basic training in safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, they have an appropriate understanding of these topics.

Managers have a staff code of conduct and grievance procedures. These are adequate but do not provide specific guidance relevant to working with apprentices, such as how staff may use social media in their interactions with apprentices.

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