

Northern Powergrid Plc

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.

Northern Powergrid is an employer provider. It runs the electricity distribution network that provides power to customers in the north east, Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire. At the time of the inspection, there were 129 apprentices. Eighty-seven were on level 3 power network crafts person standards-based programmes and the remaining 42 were on level 4 electrical power network engineer standard-based programmes. Apprentices work across the area that Northern Powergrid serves. The provider subcontracts the delivery of qualifications to two other providers.

Themes

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

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have a clearly defined apprenticeship strategy to create a sustainable workforce. Senior leaders only recruit apprentices to permanent positions where vacancies exist. Managers use information about apprentices' prior knowledge and expertise to sequence training successfully. For example, managers rearranged the delivery of modules for graduate apprentices. This enabled these apprentices to refine their previous skills and use them in the business earlier than planned. As a result, they were able to make positive contributions in the workplace.

Leaders work successfully with internal managers to plan and coordinate training programmes that link on- and off-the-job training. Managers effectively plan the delivery of high-quality training to develop apprentices' knowledge, skills and behaviours beyond the apprenticeship standards. For example, courses are provided in advanced driving, the use of scaffolding and slinging and loading.

Senior leaders have effective plans in place to develop governance arrangements. They have put in place a governance board with senior leaders from across the business who will take ownership for managing the quality of the apprenticeship programme and have oversight of apprentices' progress.

Leaders and managers recruit highly experienced and expert instructors. They ensure that instructors benefit from significant amounts of industrial updating and external training to support their development. They provide relevant education and training certificates and assessor qualifications to support instructors in their roles.

Senior leaders have an effective oversight of the apprenticeship programme. They hold managers to account for the delivery of a high-quality training and development service. Managers report regularly to the executive team. As a result, leaders and managers are self-critical and take on board the need to improve continuously. However, leaders do not receive consistently effective feedback about the progress of the whole cohort of apprentices and, as a result, find it difficult to monitor progress over time.

Leaders and managers do not conduct formal reviews of the quality of subcontracted provision. They rely on managers gathering informal feedback from apprentices at the end of each module. As a result, they are unable to measure the full impact of the provision that is subcontracted.

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

Apprentices make rapid progress in the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours. They develop their competence to complete tasks of increased complexity. For example, level 4 apprentices gain authorisation to work in substations and for network access, and level 3 apprentices develop their confidence in working at height.

Apprentices enjoy their training and they produce work of a high standard. They are self-motivated and take pride in their work-based portfolios. They methodically collect evidence of their achievement of organisational objectives. For example, they can proficiently read substation diagrams, complete switching operations and understand distribution safety rules.

Instructors are highly experienced and qualified in the industry. They use their extensive knowledge and expertise effectively when planning and delivering off-the-job training activities.

Instructors and tutors at the subcontractors provide apprentices with a wide range of effective opportunities to develop their English and mathematical skills. They provide specific feedback on the completion of mathematics tasks completed in class and facilitate revision days. Apprentices benefit from this and, consequently, develop their mathematical ability. For example, they increase their confidence in the use of vector diagrams.

The large majority of apprentices have an awareness of the requirements of end-point assessment. They can articulate what the individual components entail and know what to expect during assessment. However, too few apprentices are aware of the grades that they can achieve.

Instructors provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their progress and skills development in relation to the specific units of the qualification. However, they rely too much on apprentices' self-assessment to monitor their overall development throughout the apprenticeship. Instructors do not focus feedback on the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices should have developed at any given point in their programme.

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

Apprentices are safe and feel safe. Leaders and managers have very high expectations for safety standards. Apprentices have an excellent understanding of safety and safe working practices when conducting hazardous work. For example, they talk with confidence about risk assessments when opening substations and working in customers' homes.

Leaders and managers provide effective support to employees. They provide access to specialist external services to help staff with counselling and legal advice. Managers have successfully trained over 60 employees as mental health first aiders to provide support to colleagues.

Leaders and managers provide effective safeguarding training to staff who are responsible for line management. Managers have successfully addressed the need to re-train and raise awareness of safeguarding among staff. However, managers do not formally plan for the cascading of information regarding the 'Prevent' duty. They provide training to staff and apprentices regarding terrorism and the risk this poses to the organisation. However, a few apprentices are unclear about how the broader risks posed by radicalisation and extremism relate to them in their job roles.

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