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Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

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 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority began to deliver apprenticeships in September 2019. Apprentices work in 23 fire stations across Merseyside. Currently, 93 apprentices are studying level 3 operational firefighter apprenticeship standard. All apprentices are over 19 years of age.

Throughout the period of national COVID-19 restrictions, despite being key workers, leaders and managers ensured that apprentices continued with their learning programme without interruption.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Senior leaders and managers have a robust strategy for the curriculum they offer. They ensure that it fully meets the principles and requirements of an apprenticeship. Leaders provide apprenticeships to local people to improve their career choices, their mobility and ultimately, their lives. It is the unwavering intention of governors and leaders to provide the best operational firefighters in the country.

Leaders and managers have developed an ambitious and challenging curriculum. Apprentices receive additional trauma, breathing apparatus and fire behaviour training. As a result, apprentices develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours that extend beyond the requirements of the apprenticeship.

Leaders ensure instructors and watch managers are highly experienced and well-qualified in their roles. They support these staff to continually update their occupational knowledge and skills. For example, instructors undertake watch

manager roles and attend incidents as firefighter crew. However, instructors and watch managers do not receive additional training to develop their teaching skills further.

Governors are passionate about their apprenticeship provision. They speak enthusiastically about the positive impact apprentices have had on their organisation. Governors state that apprentices have “enthused” their workforce and made it a better place to work. Governors are visible, approachable and apprentices value this greatly.

Governors know their provision very well. They care about their apprentices and put them at the heart of everything they do. Governors receive appropriate information from senior leaders and firmly hold them to account. They set clear and measurable targets for senior leaders to improve the quality of education. Governors are very quick to authorise any resources needed to enhance the quality of apprentices’ training.

Leaders and staff support apprentices to volunteer within the local community. Apprentices deliver shopping and prescriptions to vulnerable people and people who are self-isolating. They recently raised £30,000 for charity.

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

Apprentices routinely develop substantial new knowledge, skills, and behaviours. They learn how to skilfully manage marauding terrorist attacks as well as a wide range of chemical, biological and radiological incidents. Apprentices become highly skilled, confident firefighters who are making a difference in their community.

Managers and staff who lead on the delivery of the apprenticeship programme coordinate on- and off-the job training very well. Leaders provide comprehensive training to watch managers so that they fully understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting apprentices. Apprentices benefit from routine on-the-job training from their watch manager, crew members and instructors. This enables apprentices to practice what they have learned. For example, how to remove a casualty trapped in a car seat.

Instructors and watch managers teach topics in a logical order to progressively build apprentices’ knowledge, skills, and behaviours over time. At the start of the programme, apprentices learn about the basics of firefighting and how to test and maintain equipment. They then learn how to work sensitively with people in the community to increase their awareness of safety and prevent accidents in the home. Apprentices progress to more complex activities such as contributing to fire safety inspections.

Instructors skilfully develop apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Apprentices calculate ratios when using pumps to ensure the correct water pressure. They confidently speak to vulnerable people in their homes to give them safety advice. Apprentices skilfully complete a community profile report for their station area.

Apprentices know what grades they are aiming for in their end-point assessments and work diligently towards this. Instructors routinely help apprentices to practice their skills. Where necessary, instructors simulate road traffic collisions. As a result, apprentices are very well prepared for their final assessments.

Apprentices who aspire to management positions within the fire service can progress to higher levels of learning, for example in business management.

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

Governors and leaders support a strong culture of safeguarding and protection within their organisation. Leaders complete a range of appropriate checks when appointing new staff to make sure they are suitable to work with apprentices.

The safeguarding team, staff and apprentices, receive highly effective training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. All members of the safeguarding team are suitably qualified, including at board level. As part of their curriculum, apprentices gain a mental health first aider qualification. Apprentices routinely report safeguarding referrals from incidents they have attended. For example, apprentices refer vulnerable adults at risk of harm from hoarding, self-neglect and suicide.

Leaders provide an extensive range of support to apprentices to help them with their mental health and wellbeing. In particular, after attending a traumatic incident, leaders spend time speaking in depth with apprentices to help them cope. Apprentices have access to a counsellor, nutritionist, fitness instructors and a chaplaincy team.

Apprentices enjoy their learning. They work safely and are considerate of their colleagues at all times.

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