

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Employer

Address: Fire Station
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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 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.

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (LCFA) received its first publicly funded contract for apprenticeship training in September 2019. They are an employer provider that provides apprenticeships in operational firefighting. Apprentices work in some of the 38 fire stations across the county. At the time of the new provider monitoring visit, LCFA had 79 apprentices following the level 3 operational firefighter standards-based apprenticeship.

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?

Reasonable progress

Leaders have a clear vision to provide high-quality training for apprentice firefighters. They work effectively with watch managers and other services, regionally and nationally, to develop an ambitious curriculum that helps apprentices develop the substantial new knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need to be competent firefighters. Leaders provide apprenticeships for local people to improve their careers, lives, and communities.

Leaders recruit the right training staff, with the right blend of knowledge, skills, expertise, and experience to provide high-quality training for apprentices. Training staff are competent operational firefighters with specialisms, such as breathing apparatus instruction and road traffic collision training. They all have teaching and training qualifications. Leaders support the training team to continually update their occupational knowledge and skills. For example, trainers visit other fire services to share best practice and learn new techniques on dealing with fires in high-rise buildings or to use scenario-based training in the use of breathing apparatus.

Leaders are ambitious for what apprentices are capable of and what they can achieve. They use a range of quality assurance measures to ensure apprentices receive the training and support they need to achieve their potential and become competent firefighters. Most apprentices make at least their expected levels of progress.

Leaders, managers, and governors have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. However, although their self-assessment processes inform quality improvement plans, leaders do not target and track actions and improvements well enough. As a result, they do not routinely deal with improvement priorities quickly enough.

Leaders have not fully developed ways to identify apprentices with additional support needs. Tutors are quick to offer support when apprentices self-identify and ask for help.

Leaders do not ensure that all apprentices routinely receive the information, advice, and guidance they need to be well-informed about the full range of pathways and opportunities available to them in LCFA and outside the organisation.

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 routinely develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours, building on their initial 14-week training course and then applying their learning in their fire stations. Leaders and managers plan a logically sequenced curriculum that prepares apprentices well for their firefighting role. For example, apprentices learn to use pumps and ladders. They then move on to more complex learning, such as dealing with road traffic collisions. Apprentices swiftly adopt and demonstrate the core values and behaviours central to LCFA. They work hard to 'make Lancashire safer'.

Trainers and watch managers use their experience to bring to life theory and incidents that apprentices will experience. For example, trainers with search and rescue expertise help apprentices understand the range of situations requiring the use of ropes in rescue operations. Apprentices benefit from routine on-the-job training at fire stations. This allows them to practise and apply their learning in scenario-based situations.

Trainers use drills, repetition, and simulation well to help apprentices learn more and remember more. Apprentices complete work to a high standard. They appreciate and explain the benefits of regular skills and competency testing through practical training sessions. For example, apprentices quickly identify the best way to free a casualty from an overturned car and which tools to use to complete the rescue.

Trainers and watch managers carefully monitor the progress apprentices make. They use assessment effectively to ensure apprentices who have gaps in knowledge and skills catch up quickly. For example, apprentices who need to refine their skills in air management, when using breathing apparatus, have additional sessions to gain confidence and ensure safe practice.

While apprentices who require functional skills receive the training and support they need, other apprentices do not benefit from a well-planned curriculum to develop their English, mathematics, and digital skills further.

Apprentices are aware of their final assessments, but they do not know sufficiently well what this involves, nor do they know about the range of grades available.

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

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safety, protection and safeguarding for apprentice firefighters and the communities they serve. The designated safeguarding lead and safeguarding team have the appropriate training, skills and experience to carry out their roles effectively. Leaders complete appropriate checks to ensure the suitability and experience of staff to work with apprentices.

Staff and apprentices benefit from regular training on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty and bespoke training on emerging issues, such as localised threats of radicalisation and extremism across Lancashire. Apprentices use their training to keep themselves and their communities safe. They follow well-established reporting procedures to make safeguarding referrals from incidents they attend. For example, making referrals to social services to support vulnerable residents.

Leaders effectively support apprentices on aspects, such as stress and anxiety, counselling, financial well-being, alcohol and drug issues, and mental health through their trauma risk incident management and employer assistance programmes.

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