

Althaus Digital Limited

Monitoring visit report

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Address:	Sadler Bridge Studios Bold Lane Derby DE1 3NT

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.

Althaus Digital Limited (Althaus) is an apprenticeship provider based in Derby. It specialises in digital and information technology (IT) apprenticeships. Apprentices study their courses online. At the time of the visit, Althaus had 56 adult apprentices, most of whom were in the East Midlands. They followed standards-based apprenticeships at level 3. The large majority of apprentices studied either information technology solutions or digital marketing. A few studied cyber-security technician apprenticeships. Althaus does not use subcontractors for any of its apprenticeship work.

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 rationale for their apprenticeship curriculum. They offer courses that tackle identified skills gaps, based on local labour market information and contact with employers. Leaders want their apprentices to develop successful careers within the IT and digital industries. To this end, most apprentices study additional leadership modules as part of their course.

Leaders and managers recruit only those apprentices who will gain significant new skills, knowledge and behaviours from their apprenticeship. Staff conduct thorough interviews with all apprenticeship candidates to gain a clear understanding of their starting points. They ensure that candidates with prior knowledge of the subjects either study a modified apprenticeship, or else receive guidance about higher level courses they could study elsewhere.

Althaus' staff work effectively with apprentices' line managers. Skills coaches ensure that line managers understand apprentices' progress and their modules of study. As a result, line managers plan work activities that match topics of study well.

Employers value the constructive approach of Althaus' staff when they need to resolve issues with apprentices' courses.

Both senior leaders and those responsible for governance have sufficient oversight of the curriculum. Leaders use a well-considered quality improvement plan to make changes where they identify weaknesses. Althaus' board members receive frequent information on important aspects of apprentices' performance. They use this to challenge leaders to make improvements, such as recent changes to safeguarding procedures. Although leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weakness of the curriculum they offer, on a few occasions, their quality assurance of training sessions is not thorough enough.

Skills coaches have suitable subject-related qualifications, as well as recent experience in relevant job roles. They benefit from scheduled time away from training commitments to research and prepare up-to-date course materials. In a few cases, skills coaches have not completed teaching qualifications.

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**

Skills coaches consider the curriculums that they teach carefully. They routinely include employer priorities within these. Skills coaches also arrange the order of topics well, so that in the large majority of cases, these match apprentices' starting points.

During live training sessions, skills coaches use assessment effectively to check that apprentices understand what they learn. They help apprentices if they misunderstand or struggle with a topic. Skills coaches also use assessment to make well-planned adjustments to curriculums. For example, they create additional resources or plan extra training time when apprentices find topics difficult. Apprentices also use high-quality online materials in their studies.

Apprentices' written work is of at least the expected standard, and in a few cases of a very high standard. In many cases, skills coaches provide useful feedback to help apprentices improve the standard of their work. As a result, apprentices make structural improvements to written reports, or explain their answers more thoroughly. In a few cases, however, skills coaches' feedback to apprentices is not focused enough on apprentices' individual work, and as a result does not help them to make necessary improvements.

Apprentices benefit from ample and well-planned on- and off-the-job training. They complete an array of appropriate activities, such as work-related projects and shadowing other staff. This helps them to practise what they learn. If apprentices cannot access a broad enough range of activities, leaders take suitable actions to address this.

The few apprentices who require additional support for learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive useful assistance from Althaus' staff. Apprentices who need to complete English and/or mathematics qualifications as part of their course develop their skills and knowledge well. Employers rightly value the difference that this makes at work, for example in the improvements in apprentices' ability to communicate well in writing.

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

Leaders have ensured that there is an appropriate culture of safeguarding in place at Althaus. Staff complete relevant safeguarding training, and there are adequate safer recruitment checks in place. Leaders have also developed robust measures to ensure safety during online training sessions.

Staff with specific responsibility for safeguarding have a thorough knowledge of the local risks that apprentices face. They also focus on the impact of national concerns, such as sexual harassment, on their apprentices. However, staff have not yet taken steps to understand the regional risks for apprentices who are in other areas of the country.

Apprentices are safe when they study. They rightly feel that Althaus' staff strongly care about their welfare. Apprentices benefit from a well-planned safeguarding portal, which includes an array of contemporary materials. Staff update resources to ensure that these remain up to date, and reflect the safeguarding and well-being needs that apprentices have.

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