

NA College Trust

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 1270869

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Inspection date(s): 12–13 July 2018

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of a series of monitoring visits to a sample of new apprenticeship training providers that are funded through the apprenticeship levy. Ofsted's intention to carry out monitoring visits to these new providers was first announced by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in November 2017. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

NA College Trust (NA) is an independent learning provider established in 2005. It is a private limited company with the company owner as its named director. It is one of a number of companies in the NA Group, which include NAC Outsourcing Limited, which supplies 'managed service provision' to businesses in the automotive industry. NA became a directly funded provider in November 2017. It continues to be a subcontractor of Nissan Motor Manufacturing UK and a number of further education colleges. However, this provision was out of scope for this monitoring visit.

NA currently provides training to 485 apprentices and 580 adult learners. Almost all apprentices work in the automotive industry. The great majority are on programmes in engineering and manufacturing at level 2, with the remainder on programmes in engineering and manufacturing at levels 3 and 4, and business administration and management at levels 2, 3 and 4. Only a small number of apprentices are on the new standards-based programme for maintenance technicians. Almost all adults are on short employability programmes at level 2, with a very small number taking functional skills qualifications.

Themes

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

Significant progress

Although NA has only recently become a directly funded provider, its director and managers have over 10 years' experience of delivering training and apprenticeships to major employers in the automotive industry. Over this period, they have developed an apprenticeship programme that addresses directly the skills development needs of the workforce in this highly competitive global industry. Apprenticeships are available to all sections of the workforce, including operatives on the production line, shift supervisors, office administrators, and managers. Apprentices can progress within specific occupational pathways from level 2 to level 4. Managers have recognised that they did not have the capacity or expertise to meet higher-level skills needs in engineering, business and management, so have subcontracted programmes to meet these needs to two providers that can offer further progression on to foundation degrees. The director's commitment to ensuring

that apprentices receive the most up-to-date training is demonstrated by the company's significant investment in a training centre with industry-standard facilities and resources that mirror those at a nearby large car manufacturing plant.

The director and his managers have effective oversight of the progress that apprentices make and the quality of the teaching, learning and assessment that apprentices receive. The director interrogates assiduously the timely and accurate reports that his managers and assessors provide. He takes prompt action if the performance of programmes falls below the high expectations that he sets for the college.

The director and his managers, working closely with employers, ensure that apprentices receive sufficient time to complete their required off-the-job training. Assessors, work supervisors and apprentices use effective systems to record the completion and nature of all off-the-job training and activities.

Managers and assessors have many years' experience either of working or delivering training in the automotive industry. Managers recruit recent employees from the industry and support them well to achieve their teaching and assessor qualifications. Assessors spend at least a week every year shadowing employees in the motor industry to refresh their knowledge of current working practices and new technologies. As a result, apprentices receive training that is informed by the latest developments in the industry in which they work.

Managers have drawn on their role on the national Apprenticeship Trailblazer to prepare very effectively for the delivery of the new apprenticeship standards. The first cohort of 35 apprentices on the maintenance technician standard-based programme at level 3 have just passed successfully through their gateway assessments. In addition, managers are involved in the pilots for the new T-level qualifications as a provider of work experience. This engagement with national initiatives ensures that NA's teaching and assessment practices contribute to and stay abreast of the latest developments in the sector.

The director and his managers have an accurate understanding of the current strengths and areas for development in their provision. Arrangements to assure the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have identified accurately the areas that still need further improvement, such as recording all aspects of apprentices' starting points and ensuring that this informs assessors' delivery of training.

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

The director, managers and employers ensure that apprentices receive high-quality training that develops their workplace knowledge and skills rapidly. Work supervisors

and assessors implement rigorous training plans based on their assessment of the apprentices' existing knowledge and skills before they start their programmes.

Assessors record accurately the progress that apprentices make. They work alongside apprentices' workplace supervisors to ensure that apprentices undertake work tasks that enable them to meet their qualification criteria. Assessments of practical skills are thorough and fair, using observation and skilful questioning to identify apprentices' strengths and areas in which they need to improve further.

Apprentices produce portfolios of work to a high standard that demonstrate fully their acquisition of technical knowledge and understanding. Assessors provide very helpful feedback to apprentices about the quality of their work, including on their standards of presentation and written English, and their use of mathematics. Apprentices act on this feedback effectively to make improvements to their work. As a result, a high proportion of apprentices are on track to complete their qualifications within their planned timescales.

Apprentices at all levels develop new knowledge and skills. Maintenance engineers can demonstrate confidently what they have learned about three-phase motors and how to use lathes and milling machines. Business administration apprentices develop comprehensive knowledge and understanding of data protection and the different types of information that can be included in electronic communications. Apprentices on standards-based programmes have a good understanding of their gateway assessments. They feel confident in their readiness to take the assessment because they have been prepared thoroughly by their assessors.

Apprentices have a detailed understanding of the behaviours that they need to develop, with a strong emphasis on health and safety and risk assessment. They are highly motivated to succeed by their training in the classroom and the workplace. Managers and assessors provide apprentices with high-quality enrichment activities that develop their self-confidence and team-working skills. For example, apprentices are encouraged to become 'STEM ambassadors', in which role they go out to give presentations to local school pupils about careers in engineering and manufacturing.

As a result of the high-quality training that they receive and the investment that their employers commit to this training, most apprentices progress on to successful careers in the automotive industry and its extensive supply chain.

Trainers of the theoretical components of the new maintenance technician standards-based programme are not sufficiently adept at using information about apprentices' prior attainment to plan and deliver activities to develop their knowledge and confidence further. As a result, those apprentices with less previous knowledge are reluctant to contribute to discussions or answer questions in theory classes.

What progress have managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality adult education that prepares them well for their intended job role, careers aims and/or personal goals?

Reasonable progress

The director and his managers have developed successfully a range of programmes that are designed specifically to equip unemployed adults with the skills and qualifications that will secure jobs for them in the automotive industry. The great majority of adult learners are on short courses at level 2. Often these courses are of no more than four days in length, in subjects such as lean manufacture, industrial-environmental awareness, warehousing and storage, and performing manufacturing operations. NA also delivers adult learning through a sector work-based academy for the automotive industry. Most adults take a number of qualifications to enhance their employment opportunities. NA offers an employment-brokerage service that provides opportunities for learners to apply for work in the automotive industry.

A high proportion of adults achieve qualifications on short courses. Many learners progress into employment and, when in employment, some of them become apprentices. The sector work-based academy is particularly successful, with nearly half of learners securing jobs in the automotive industry or in one of its supply chain companies. Progression into employment or further training is also high from the lean-manufacturing and industrial-awareness courses. The recently introduced qualification in warehousing and distribution has been less successful in enabling adults to move straight into employment, but managers have started to work with major distribution companies in the north west of England to try to replicate the success that they have had in the north east.

Learners on short courses to develop basic engineering competencies are prepared effectively for their next steps. Trainers ensure that learners complete key tasks such as removing nuts and bolts following precise instructions, and at the required speed. Developing these skills enables learners to do well at recruitment events with the local large car manufacturer and its allied companies.

The director and his managers are committed to developing the English and mathematical skills of unemployed adults as they recognise that, for these adults to progress at work, they need to write proficiently and carry out calculations accurately. However, due to the short duration of the courses that adults attend, there is not enough time to teach these skills through integrating them into the core subjects. As a result, not enough of the small number of learners who take functional skills qualifications achieve these qualifications. This is exacerbated by the poor attendance of learners at English and mathematics classes.

The director and his managers have effective oversight of the progress that adult learners make on their courses and the quality of the provision. They have responded swiftly to address the weaknesses in the delivery of English and mathematics by appointing new staff and redesigning the delivery model and

resources for these subjects. However, it is still too early to see the impact of these changes.

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

The director and his managers have established effective arrangements to ensure that apprentices and adult learners feel and are kept safe. They develop and promote a strong safeguarding culture within the organisation. Most apprentices understand how to report any safeguarding concerns, including those posed by the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

Managers implement effective safe recruitment procedures. All staff have enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks, which are renewed every three years. All staff have now completed the online safeguarding and 'Prevent' training that the provider's in-house video-production company designed to make it relevant to the environments in which apprentices work.

The team of appropriately trained safeguarding officers meet regularly to review reports of any safeguarding concerns. They use the lessons from these concerns adroitly to inform refresher safeguarding training for staff. They have developed effective relationships with agencies that can provide support to learners and apprentices, particularly those with mental health issues.

Staff at every level in NA reinforce health and safety in all aspects of their operations, mirroring the rigorous adherence to safe working practices in the automotive sector. Thorough and timely risk assessments are completed on training venues across the geographically dispersed delivery.

The director and his managers have a passionate commitment to promoting the health and well-being of their apprentices and learners by providing free breakfasts and lunches in the on-site cafe. This has been rewarded by increased levels of retention and course completion.

Although managers have completed a 'Prevent' duty risk assessment and action plan, these have not been updated. However, this has not had any significant impact on the implementation of the duty as apprentices and adult learners have a very good level of awareness of the risks presented by radicalisation and extremism.

A few assessors had either not completed their mandatory online safeguarding training or submitted their certificates for this training when this was checked on the first day of the visit. On the second day of the visit, all staff had either completed the training or their certificates had been located.

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