

Inspection of United Utilities Water Limited

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 May 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Information about this provider

United Utilities Water Limited provides water and wastewater services in the northwest of England. It provides training for apprentices to become operatives, technicians and engineers in the water industry. Most of the apprenticeship training is based at the technical training centre in Bolton.

At the time of the inspection, there were 110 apprentices in learning. Most apprentices study at level 3, with the largest number on water process technician and utilities engineering technician apprenticeship standards. Two apprentices study the level 2 water process operative apprenticeship, and five apprentices study the level 3 water industry network technician apprenticeship.

The provider does not subcontract any of its provision.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices appreciate the opportunities that their apprenticeship gives them. They develop essential knowledge and skills working in live water and wastewater treatment sites. Apprentices start their apprenticeships at a technical training centre situated on a live wastewater treatment site. Leaders ensure that apprentices have access to high-quality workshops and technical equipment where they carry out tasks, such as collecting water samples to test in the laboratory.

Most apprentices' attendance to training sessions is high. Leaders and trainers set clear expectations from the beginning of the apprenticeship. They communicate these clear expectations to apprentices' managers and mentors to ensure that training is a priority. If apprentices are absent from training, trainers plan one-to-one sessions to help them to catch up.

Apprentices learn new knowledge and skills that they need to be successful in their careers in the water industry. Trainers are specialists in their subjects. They use their expertise to teach apprentices how theory is relevant to their workplace. For example, level 3 water industry treatment process technician apprentices learn about heterotrophic, autotrophic and zoogloal bacteria and how they impact on wastewater filters, ponding and drainage.

Apprentices develop the personal and professional attributes they need for the workplace. Apprentices attend an outward-bound experience as part of their induction. This helps them to establish positive working relationships with their peers. Apprentices develop the confidence they need to be successful in their roles.

Apprentices enjoy their apprenticeship as they are made to feel part of a wider team. Level 3 utilities engineering technician apprentices attend weekly maintenance meetings and team briefings. They are kept well informed about on-site priorities. Apprentices make valuable contributions to the workplace, such as helping to reduce septic sludge in wastewater tanks by more frequent pH testing.

Apprentices feel safe. They know how to report any concerns they have on site and in the technical training centre. Apprentices are trained in how to identify customers who may be vulnerable and the support available to them. However, apprentices are not taught about risks local to where they live or work.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders are ambitious for apprentices and the apprenticeships they offer. They are acutely aware of industry skills shortages and the importance of succession planning. Leaders plan apprenticeships to provide a pipeline of talent, to support apprentices to successfully achieve their apprenticeship and to secure employment beyond it.

Trainers plan and teach the curriculum in a logical order. Level 3 water industry network technician apprentices learn about the basic components of water systems, sewers and valve hydrants before learning how to find and fix faults in these components and how to use hydraulics.

Trainers sequence the curriculum in a way that helps bring learning to life. Level 3 water industry treatment process technician apprentices tour an on-site hypochlorite generation system and a service reservoir when learning about advanced water treatment and water storage. Trainers demonstrate how these systems work. Apprentices' experiences of working on live sites help them to recall key concepts and link theory to practice.

Trainers prioritise the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills. Level 3 utilities engineering technician apprentices use revision materials to help them to quickly develop their English skills at the start of their apprenticeships. Level 3 water industry network technician apprentices calculate the wastewater flow rate for new housing estates. Level 3 water industry treatment process technician apprentices practise report writing and calculate when overflow systems should be used in storms. Apprentices recognise how English and mathematical skills are essential to their roles.

Most trainers use assessment effectively and provide detailed feedback to help apprentices improve their work. However, in a few instances, feedback and targets do not tell apprentices how they can improve their professional behaviours when at work.

Most apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to successfully achieve their apprenticeship. Apprentices with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive the support they need. Apprentices who require adaptations, use audio and video recordings as alternatives to written assessments. This removes barriers to learning for these apprentices.

Leaders have rectified, or improved, most of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. However, the number of apprentices who achieve distinction grades remains too low. Around half of apprentices who achieve their apprenticeship attain a distinction. Trainers do not always use information about apprentices' starting points to plan individualised learning so that all apprentices make the progress they are capable of to achieve the highest grades.

Leaders use robust quality assurance processes, including observation, audits of progress reviews and bi-annual apprentice surveys, to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders are aware that a minority of line managers do not routinely attend progress reviews to provide timely support. They recognise that this is due to changes of management on some sites. Leaders have improved communication to rectify this.

Apprentices benefit from useful careers advice and guidance. Leaders and trainers help apprentices to understand career pathways. Level 3 utilities engineering

technician apprentices discuss a career path tree with their trainer in reviews. This helps them to identify roles such as flexi-skill field service engineer and programmable logic controller. Leaders plan 'learning for work' weeks where apprentices attend talks about career opportunities. Annual reviews help apprentices to identify potential routes into management roles. Apprentices are prepared well for their next steps.

Leaders and trainers help apprentices to maintain their physical fitness and well-being. Apprentices have access to private healthcare and subsidised gym membership. Over half of apprentices have had health checks from a mobile fitness unit that visits organisation sites. A few apprentices are trained mental health first aiders to provide support to colleagues. Apprentices complete training in sexual consent and have a good understanding of healthy relationships.

Governors receive helpful information from senior leaders to provide support and challenge and to bring about improvements. They work productively with senior leaders to ensure oversight of apprentices' progress and to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure that all apprentices receive clear and accurate feedback on what they need to do to improve, including feedback related to professional behaviours.
- Ensure that information from initial assessment is used to plan personalised curriculums so that apprentices achieve the highest grades.
- Ensure that apprentices have a clear understanding of the risks local to where they live and work.
- Ensure that apprentices' line managers attend progress reviews with their apprentices to inform training plans and enable timely support.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1244875
Address	Bolton Technical Training Centre Red Rock Lane Stoneclough, Radcliffe Manchester M26 1FL
Contact number	01925 537590
Website	www.unitedutilities.com
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jacqueline Kawczak
Provider type	Employer provider
Date of previous inspection	1 to 3 August 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality and pastoral support manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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