

Inspection of Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Inspection dates: 5 to 8 July 2022

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) is part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) leads GMFRS and is accountable to the Deputy Mayor at Greater Manchester Combined Authority. GMCA received its first apprenticeship contract in May 2017. GMCA teaches standards-based apprenticeships through the employer levy. At the time of the inspection, 195 apprentices were studying operational firefighting at level 3. GMCA subcontracts their English and mathematics functional skills tuition to another training provider.

Apprentices complete a 16-week basic firefighting training programme at the fire and rescue training centres before they are posted to their watch at one of the 41 fire stations located across Greater Manchester.

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

Leaders, managers and trainers set very high expectations for apprentices' behaviour, discipline, conduct and attendance during initial training and when working in stations. Apprentices quickly learn the importance of being ready for operational duties and the impact of lateness on their watch and ability to be deployed. They are highly conscientious professionals.

Apprentices consistently demonstrate exceptional workplace behaviours. They are articulate, disciplined and respectful. Apprentices understand how to work as part of a safety critical team. They are highly motivated and want to succeed. Apprentices are extremely proud to be part of the fire service. They swiftly develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours to become operational firefighters.

Apprentices are well supported to develop the skills and behaviours they need to help protect the communities they serve. They consistently make positive contributions to their communities by taking part in volunteering and charity fundraising events. Apprentices participate in open days and speak to school children about fire and water safety to build positive relationships with the public.

Apprentices improve their confidence as a result of their apprenticeship. As they attend more callouts, they build their confidence and self-esteem to become capable and effective firefighters. Apprentices routinely reflect on the emergency incidents they attend at work. They effectively evaluate what they did well and what skills they need to improve. This helps them to be more self-aware and be better at their job.

Apprentices work safely, use equipment safely and feel safe at work. They approach tasks in a methodical manner and are considerate of their colleagues. Apprentices explain clearly the critical importance of safety as a firefighter. They benefit from the support of their tutors, watch managers and colleagues in an inclusive environment. Apprentices quickly become part of the fire service family.

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

Senior Leaders and those responsible for governance are ambitious for their apprentice firefighters to be the best they can be. They recognise that the training that apprentice firefighters receive must be of the highest quality to ensure they can fulfil their mission 'to protect communities, work together and save lives'.

Leaders plan an ambitious curriculum for apprentices that goes beyond the requirements of their apprenticeship programme to meet the specialist needs of the region. Apprentices benefit from a bespoke curriculum tailored for their needs and those of their station. For example, leaders provide additional rope training for working at height rather than just using ladders. This helps to train firefighters to deal with emergencies in high-rise buildings or at the airport. As a result, apprentice firefighters develop an enhanced set of specialist skills that make them more effective at work. Trainers plan and teach the curriculum in a logical order to develop

safe and competent firefighters. They systematically recap on apprentices' previous learning, and design the training, so that apprentices develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours incrementally. For example, in the initial weeks of training, apprentices develop their spatial awareness through practising tunnel and height work exercises. When they move to the breathing apparatus topics, they are more confident working in confined spaces with specialist equipment. Training prepares apprentices effectively for their roles, ensuring they are more competent and confident when moving into an operational role on station.

Leaders are ambitious for all apprentices, including those with additional learning needs who are well supported and achieve as well as other apprentices. Leaders swiftly identify any apprentices that require support or may be disadvantaged. For example, apprentices benefit from working with educational psychologists to identify where trainers may need to modify the training, and support apprentices in the classroom and during practical training.

Leaders ensure that trainers in the training centre are well-qualified, experienced, competent firefighters. They maintain their competency as firefighters, complete teaching and training qualifications, and study specialist instructor programmes in breathing apparatus and road traffic collisions. Training centre trainers use their knowledge and experience to the benefit of their apprentices. Crew Managers and those with a training role in the fire stations do not benefit from the same training and quality assurance processes. Consequently, senior leaders do not have a good enough overview of the quality of training at the stations.

Trainers use a range of teaching and assessment strategies effectively to help apprentices understand key concepts. They ensure apprentices repeat and practise new techniques to master the skills to be an effective firefighter, so they know more and can do more over time. For example, apprentices develop their competence in using breathing apparatus by entering burning and smoked filled buildings every day for two weeks, following two weeks of practise and safety training. This leads to apprentices performing rescues confidently in smoke filled spaces.

Most apprentices receive useful feedback from their trainers that tells them what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. However, the quality and recording of progress reviews and interim reviews, known as 'health checks', are inconsistent. 'Health checks' completed by workplace tutors (WPTs) are too brief and focus on the checking of evidence submission rather than on the knowledge, skills and behaviours that apprentices need to develop further. In a few cases, WPTs do not always set challenging areas for development to help apprentices focus on their learning priorities. All apprentices who have reached their final assessments have achieved their apprenticeship. However, too few have achieved distinction grades.

Apprentices benefit from a wide range of information, guidance and support to help them stay physically and mentally healthy. They develop their physical fitness for the long term. Dedicated personal trainers and fitness instructors provide personal training plans where required. Apprentices use gym facilities to work on their strength and physical conditioning. They benefit from the support of physiotherapists to help with injury

recovery. As a result, apprentices are supported to become 'tactical athletes' to ensure they have the fitness required to be a safe operational firefighter for a long career.

Apprentices benefit from very effective support to develop their emotional resilience in the role. They receive training and support to help normalise the psychological, physiological and emotional responses of attending traumatic and distressing incidents and events. As a result, apprentices swiftly develop their emotional resilience and an understanding of when to seek any additional help they need.

Leaders and those responsible for governance know the key strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. They have taken effective steps to improve on the weaknesses they identified through their self-assessment process. Leaders have successfully rectified the areas for improvement identified at the new provider monitoring visit.

Those responsible for governance have an accurate understanding of the quality and effectiveness of training that apprentices receive. They use their extensive knowledge, experience and skills as the most senior firefighters in the service to hold senior leaders in the training team to account for the quality of apprentices' training. Those responsible for governance demonstrate a clear understanding of the provider's strengths and weaknesses.

Leaders, managers and WPTs have an increasingly accurate oversight of the progress that apprentices make. However, apprentices who have been on the programme for a long period of time, have not routinely benefited from WPT contact throughout their programme. As a result, a few apprentices have not made the swift progress of which they are capable.

While most apprentices have made well-informed decisions to become firefighters, leaders do not routinely provide apprentices with effective careers and progression guidance. Not all apprentices understand the possible alternative career options available to them.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The CFO, leaders and managers place the safeguarding and well-being of apprentices and staff at the heart of what they do. They have developed a strong culture of safety and safeguarding for apprentice firefighters and the communities they serve. Leaders engender a culture of health and safety in all aspects of operational firefighter training. They ensure that apprentices are well prepared for a role that, by necessity, puts them in harm's way.

The safeguarding team, trainers and watch managers use appropriate processes, procedures and systems to record, action and follow up on any safeguarding issues and incidents. They support apprentices effectively and use external referral partners, including the police and mental health services when necessary. For example, when

apprentices attend serious incidents, they receive a 'hot-debrief' to immediately discuss their thoughts and concerns on what they have dealt with and seen. Leaders follow this up with a later 'diffusion' meeting to provide further checks on apprentices' welfare and well-being.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Ensure trainers in the fire stations receive the training they need to improve and assure the quality of training for their apprentices.
- Ensure that workplace trainers routinely set challenging areas for development to help apprentices focus on their learning priorities and achieve their potential.
- Ensure trainers routinely provide apprentices with effective careers and progression guidance, so that all apprentices understand the possible alternative career options available to them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2510878
Address	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service Training and Development Centre Cassidy Close Manchester Greater Manchester M4 5HU
Contact number	0161 736 5866
Website	www.manchesterfire.gov.uk
Principal/CEO	Dave Russel, Chief Fire Officer
Provider type	Employer
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	The Education and Skills Partnership Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the Learning and Development Manager, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous monitoring visit 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.

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