



**UNIVERSITY
OF THE YEAR**

Academic Employability
Awards 2026

Graduate Futures
Institute



**University of
Staffordshire**

Our Ofsted inspection experience

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Institutional context

University of Staffordshire (UoS)

A leading national provider of higher and degree apprentices (approx. 5.5k from 2015/16 to 2024/25, currently +10% of student body)

Civic anchor institution working with local employers to address skills needs – strong tradition of work-related learning, employer engagement and work-ready graduates: 78.9% graduate progression, 22% graduate retention in Staffordshire

#2 nationally for social inclusion (Good University Guide 2026)

At time of inspection, 2.1k apprentices across 18 standards (levels 5 to 7, diverse disciplines across both academic Schools)

First University to be inspected for apprenticeships under new Ofsted Education Inspection Framework (EIF) (Feb 2026)

Significant changes to University structures and staffing (Feb 2025), incl. new Ofsted nominee and shadow for apprenticeships (Jan 2026)



UoS Apprenticeships roles

Curriculum and Academic Affairs

Quality assurance, educational enhancement and Registry functions

Ofsted nominee and shadow

Leadership and Governance – **expected**

Academic Schools

Digital, Technology, Innovation and Business

Health, Education, Policing and Sciences

Curriculum, Teaching and Training – **strong**

Achievement – **expected**

Student Life

Student support, library and skills (including Work-Based Education Officers), employability

Safeguarding – **met**

Inclusion – **expected**

Participation and Development – **strong**

Other University services

Business to Markets

Business Intelligence and Management Reporting

HR and Organisational Development

Before the visit



w/c 16 Feb 2026

Mon AM: Notification call (Ofsted lead inspector [LI]/ UoS Executive contact) – for inspection visit 24-27 Feb

Mon AM: Initial planning call (Ofsted LI / UoS nominee) – briefing on what to expect and next steps

Tue AM (*normally Mon PM*): Second planning call (Ofsted LI / UoS nominee) – setting out the institutional context to inform initial areas of inspection etc.

Thu PM: Check-in call (Ofsted LI / UoS nominee) – any pre-visit queries

Stakeholder surveys to be circulated in advance (learners, employers, staff)

Operational details including Wi-Fi access

A staff list and/or organisational structure diagram for apprenticeship provision, contact information for key staff, staff CVs

Staff CPD over the last 2 years, including safeguarding related mandatory training

Inclusion policy/strategy, attendance and behaviour policies and procedures

Non-subject curriculum plans such as careers programme, wider development programme

Minutes and papers for last three governor meetings and senior leadership meetings re: apprenticeships

Ofsted required information

Continued...

- All apprentices by subject and level; name; start / planned end date; phone numbers; age and date of birth; place of work; employer name and contact
- Apprentices with SEND / barriers to learning; break in learning; functional skills
- Institutional SAR and QIP
- Timetable of all learning/off-the-job activities for apprentices during visit, incl. teaching, 1:1s and progress reviews
- Details of additional activity during visit, that apprentices may access to contribute to their skills development

Available during visit (need not be shared in advance):

- Access to virtual learning environments
- Access to apprentices' work (written and/or practical) and portfolios
- Access to careers and wider development teaching resources including those about Prevent and fundamental British values
- Safeguarding information, including single central record; any referrals to designated safeguarding lead with brief details of the resolution; any referrals to local authority designated officer regarding staff or other adults



Pre-visit



Reflections and preparations

My first direct experience of Ofsted inspection, so comparisons not possible, but...

Lead inspector sought to make the rules/criteria clear and was transparent about EIF being new to them as well as us

Explicit focus on staff wellbeing from outset, e.g. checking for reasonable adjustments

Pre-Ofsted call (Dec 2025): External quality review to build staff experience/confidence re: Ofsted inspection process

From notification to visit: Briefing and planning meetings, document repository, shared online forum, set-up of visit staffing and spaces (incl. UoS 'war room' to field on-site Ofsted queries)

Structured support and constant communications to sustain shared confidence in provision quality and inspection readiness – next time starting much sooner...

Ofsted inspection visit

w/c 23 Feb

Six inspectors over four days:

- Lead and deputy lead with HE experience
- Each focused on different inspection areas

Daily briefing and debrief meetings between Ofsted inspection team and UoS nominee

Additional visit by senior inspector (Thu) to gather feedback on our inspection experience

Grading meeting with UoS nominee followed by feedback to Executive, Governors and DfE (Fri)

Five initial focus areas (IFAs) (standards) and then three additional areas, selected on basis of volume of learners and representative range of provision

For each IFA: meetings with staff, learners and employers; observations of teaching and progress reviews; desk reviews of teaching materials and learners' work

Leadership meetings on each inspection theme plus learning walks on inclusion and curriculum, teaching and training

Additional documentation: course level QIPs and handbooks; inclusion plans, support case studies and staff training; subcontracting agreements; data on learner attendance, demographics, NSS, EPA first time pass rates, progression/destinations



Visit reflections



Ofsted inspection approach...

Supportive approach – inspection team generally clear about what they're looking for and proactive in facilitating 'translation' from HE to Ofsted 'speak', to enable us to showcase our strengths (rather than 'catch us out')

Emphasis on triangulation (not one source) and consistency (not pockets of performance)

Transparent throughout about how evidence assessed and what's needed to secure next grade 'up' – later sessions/evidence requests structured to give opportunities to meet this

... what worked / lessons learned for UoS

Importance of physical and virtual spaces for coordinating UoS supporting activity across multiple teams

Rolling debriefs on inspection sessions and feedforward to UoS contributors

Don't underestimate the resource needed for logistics – scheduling, documentation collation, debrief and feedforward – as well as for the main inspection activity

Importance of closing the loop (under embargo) with all involved to thank and celebrate success

UoS secrets of success?

**‘Strong’ in Curriculum, Teaching and Training
and Participation and Development**

A truly University-wide approach

Integrated learner support from academic
teams, Student Life and employers

Consistently high-quality provision,
evidenced by strong apprentice experience
and outcomes (for both learners and
employers) across the portfolio

Breadth and depth of co-curricular
opportunities, apprentices included by
design (not an afterthought)



Top tips

Or, what we'll do again / differently next time...

Documentation and supporting evidence: a shared and continuous Ofsted readiness activity, not a pre-inspection task

Building and maintaining a cross-University community to share good practices and Ofsted awareness/confidence (and thereby also support inspection readiness)

Thinking creatively about how to resource the inspection visit itself in the context of increasing pressures/demands on staff





Thank you!

Questions, comments, reflections?

To find out more:

- <https://www.staffs.ac.uk/apprenticeships>
- <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/43/133882>
- clare.saunders@staffs.ac.uk

Listen to the recording [HERE](#)