

Colchester Institute

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 130674

Name of lead inspector: Derrick Baughan HMI

Inspection dates: 29 June and 5 October 2016

Type of provider: General further education college

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted carried out a desk-top analysis of this provider, due to information received. As a result of the analysis, Ofsted decided to carry out a monitoring visit focused on study programmes delivered by Virtual Learning UK (VLUK), on premises owned by Lee Westwood Golf School (LWGS).

Inspectors carried out two visits to the college. At the first visit to the college's main campus in Colchester, the inspector interviewed staff and reviewed a range of documentation which included safeguarding policies and learners' records. The themes for the monitoring visit report are based on the evidence found at this first visit. The second visit was carried out by one HMI and the regional SHMI. During this visit, inspectors met with the college's staff, VLUK's staff, and visited both the college's main campus and LWGS's training site, where the study programme is provided. In addition, inspectors reviewed promotional, marketing and induction materials.

Themes

The extent to which the college has improved the quality of VLUK's safeguarding policy.

Significant progress

During the first visit, the inspector found that VLUK's safeguarding policy document was of poor quality; it was ambiguous and imprecise in its use of language. Too many of the statements in the document had the potential to be misleading and could result in staff taking incorrect or inappropriate action when dealing with a safeguarding matter. For example, the wording implied that following a disclosure, staff may be able to resolve the issue themselves without involving the designated safeguarding person.

Since the first visit, the college's designated leads on safeguarding have worked well with VLUK staff to produce a new safeguarding policy document. This has resulted in clear and precise statements regarding the actions that staff should carry out. The written language used is unequivocal and adheres well to national guidance on safeguarding matters. The document provides a good level of guidance for staff to follow and take appropriate action, including involving the designated person, when dealing with safeguarding issues.

The extent to which VLUK safeguard learners and monitor the development of their understanding of safeguarding. Reasonable progress

During both visits, inspectors observed that the college staff and VLUK staff place good emphasis on the safety of learners while they are studying on the study programmes at the training site. VLUK's staff monitor learners' safety well; for example, by ensuring that all staff and learners wear their identification at all times and that access to all the training rooms is supervised. Learners have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe in the training rooms. The college monitors VLUK's safeguarding arrangements effectively through regular scrutiny of records, observation visits and joint learning walks. The subcontracting contract documents all monitoring processes and responsibilities of VLUK and the college thoroughly.

During the first visit, the inspector identified that the promotion of learners' understanding of safeguarding, including the recording of discussions with learners about their safeguarding experience, required improvement. Recordings of activities and discussions illustrated that staff did not use questioning techniques to check and extend learners' understanding of safeguarding sufficiently. The recordings of learners' understanding of safeguarding were too brief and did not demonstrate that progress reviews and tutorials enabled learners to acquire sufficient depth of knowledge of safeguarding issues. College staff did not monitor the quality of learners' progress reviews and tutorials, to ensure that VLUK staff enabled learners to acquire a good level of understanding of safeguarding.

Since the first visit, college leaders and managers have worked well with VLUK to improve staff's questioning techniques to elicit, check and consolidate learners' understanding of safeguarding. Good emphasis has also been placed on improving the quality of recording discussions with learners about their safeguarding experience, including in progress reviews and tutorials. As a result, VLUK staff now explore effectively learners' understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Learners are safe and feel safe. College managers now monitor rigorously how VLUK staff promote learners' understanding of safeguarding. However, records still do not demonstrate how VLUK staff improve learners' understanding of wider safeguarding issues. While learners have a good level of awareness as to how to keep themselves safe, they are not sufficiently clear about issues such as what to do if they notice a visible change in the behaviour of one of their peers. College staff and VLUK staff are aware of the need to rectify this and have plans in place to provide pertinent activities, including 'mock' scenarios, to enable staff to introduce, develop and reinforce learners' understanding of wider safeguarding issues.

The extent to which the two aspects of the learners' experience are clear and separate, and learners' understanding of the safeguarding implications of this distinction.

Significant progress

During the first visit, the college's leaders clarified the arrangements for the learners, all of whom are enrolled with the college and studying full-time on 16–19 study programmes. The college subcontracts the provision of all elements of the study programme to VLUK. Additionally, and as part of a separate agreement that does not receive any public funds, the learners and/or parents/carers privately pay LWGS for privately provided accommodation and privately provided sports tuition. The college principal confirmed that while the accommodation that the learners reside in is a part of the LWGS privately funded provision, all elements of the 16–19 study programme are provided by VLUK.

During the second visit, inspectors observed that marketing and induction materials are explicit in clearly making a distinction between the two aspects of the learners' experience: the publicly funded study programme, and the privately funded training and accommodation provided by LWGS. However, marketing and induction materials do not make reference to the separate accountabilities of safeguarding responsibilities. Learners are clear that there are two separate elements to their experience but are not sufficiently aware of the separate safeguarding responsibilities of each organisation. During the second visit, college leaders produced a letter which they plan to send to all current and future learners and their parents/carers to ensure that they understand fully the distinction and the implications regarding the separate accountabilities of safeguarding responsibilities of the college/VLUK and LWGS. College leaders and VLUK have clear plans in place to reinforce this understanding at learners' induction, progress reviews and tutorials.

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