

# Virtual College

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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**Unique reference number:** 54946

**Name of lead inspector:** Sarah Stabler Her Majesty's Inspector

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**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## Monitoring visit: main findings

### Context and focus of visit

Virtual College was inspected in November 2018. At that time, inspectors judged overall effectiveness to require improvement. The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Virtual College has held a funding contract to deliver apprenticeships since 2007. At the time of the monitoring visit, it had 26 apprentices in learning across the north of England, of whom 25 were on level 3 standards-based apprenticeships in digital marketing. One apprentice was completing the level 4 cybersecurity standards-based apprenticeship. Virtual College delivers online learning in a range of specialist subjects, including safeguarding and personal development.

### Themes

#### **How effectively do leaders and managers identify and address areas for improvement in the quality of education? Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers successfully promote a culture of personal development. Managers plan time for tutors to attend conferences and workshops so that tutors can develop their expertise by learning from specialists in information technology about new advances in the industry. Tutors use their expertise to support apprentices well in the rapidly changing digital industry.

Leaders and managers have ended their relationships with subcontractors. They managed the wind-down of learning programmes effectively so that almost all apprentices successfully completed their programmes.

Managers and tutors proactively involve employers in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme. Tutors work successfully with apprentices and workplace supervisors to assess apprentices' progress in the development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Consequently, apprentices make good progress and the few apprentices that have recently completed their apprenticeships passed their end-point assessment at the first attempt.

Leaders and managers plan and deliver a curriculum that successfully supports apprentices, including those not required to take qualifications, to improve and reinforce their English and mathematics skills. Apprentices make good progress in developing their English and mathematics skills and apply these skills successfully at work.

Leaders and managers have redesigned their approach to measuring apprentices' starting points. They carefully assess apprentices' existing knowledge, skills and

behaviours in relation to their apprenticeship standard. However, tutors often do not use this information effectively enough to sequence learning for digital marketing apprentices to enable them to build rapidly on what they know and can do.

Leaders and managers regularly and accurately evaluate the quality of training activities. They provide helpful feedback to tutors that improves the quality of training resources. However, performance management reviews do not focus sufficiently on the pedagogical skills that tutors need to develop to improve their teaching practice.

Leaders and managers do not collect sufficient information about the progression of apprentices in the workplace or their destinations on completion of their apprenticeship. As a result, they are unable to measure the full impact of apprenticeships to inform curriculum design and future delivery.

**How well do tutors plan and implement a curriculum that ensures that apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours? Reasonable progress**

Tutors make innovative use of online tools and resources to deliver training activities that build on apprentices' existing knowledge. They use online tests to assess apprentices' understanding and they facilitate 'breakout' rooms within webinars to address gaps in apprentices' knowledge. Apprentices benefit from targeted one-to-one support in the workplace from their tutors to supplement the online delivery.

Managers work effectively with employers to identify relevant tasks and training activities for on-and off-the-job training. For example, after learning about coding, apprentices design mailers that lead to an increased social media following for their employer. Employers value the training that apprentices receive and are highly satisfied with the benefit that apprentices provide to the business.

Tutors plan and deliver specialist training to enhance apprentices' skills on topics such as 'Google analytics' and 'SEM rush'. Cybersecurity apprentices learn about virtual local area networks to enable them to separate networks on the same devices in order to improve security.

Tutors deliver highly effective revision webinars which help apprentices to prepare for their English and mathematics examinations. As a result, a high proportion of apprentices achieve their functional skills qualifications.

Tutors in cybersecurity plan and sequence learning effectively to ensure that apprentices gain powerful knowledge at the start of their programme. They design and deliver very effective practical activities to support apprentices to develop their understanding of networking concepts. For example, tutors work with apprentices to build a basic network protocol. Then, apprentices use 'subnetting' to build more complex networks. Finally, the tutor sets faults in the network and apprentices use their knowledge and skills to fix the problems.

Tutors in digital marketing do not use information about apprentices' starting points well enough to plan the order of training and assessment activities. Almost all apprentices access the same webinar programme at the same time, regardless of their ability. Consequently, a small minority of apprentices find the pace of the webinars challenging, and struggle to retain the knowledge.

**How effective is the provision of careers advice and guidance in supporting apprentices to make informed choices about their next steps? Reasonable progress**

Leaders and managers work effectively with local schools to provide careers advice about apprenticeships. They attend careers events to talk to pupils about careers in the digital industry. As a result, leaders and managers make positive contributions to careers education for young people in their local community.

Apprentices, including those with additional needs, receive thorough advice and guidance prior to the start of their apprenticeship. Tutors support apprentices to update their curriculum vitae, plan their travel and understand the requirements of employers. As a result, candidates are effectively matched to apprenticeship vacancies and are well prepared for their interviews.

Managers and tutors create high-quality online resources to support apprentices' personal development. Tutors use these modules successfully to provide apprentices with important knowledge on setting personal objectives and managing their own development. Tutors use online assessment well to measure how much apprentices remember.

Leaders and managers have recently introduced careers coaching sessions for apprentices. They provide helpful advice and access to resources that help apprentices make more informed choices about their next steps. However, only a few apprentices have taken up this opportunity so it is too soon to measure the impact of the interventions.

Apprentices do not receive sufficient access to careers education in relation to the digital industries. Managers have recently introduced podcasts with employers to provide apprentices with an insight into careers in the industry. However, it is too early to measure how well these resources develop apprentices' knowledge of the sector.

Managers and tutors do not provide effective support about possible next steps for the few apprentices who do not sustain their jobs on completion of their apprenticeship.

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