

# EMA Training Limited

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1278626

**Name of lead inspector:** Bob Hamp, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 30 September – 1 October 2020

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** Progress House  
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## **Interim visit**

### **Context and focus of visit**

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

### **Information about the provider**

EMA Training Limited (EMA) is a small, privately owned training provider specialising in finance, IT and digital apprenticeships. It started business in 2013 and began offering courses through the apprenticeship levy in February 2018. At the time of the visit, 75 apprentices were on standards-based apprenticeships, all of whom were aged 16 or over. The majority of apprentices study at levels 2, 3 and 4 in accountancy. A minority of apprentices study at level 3 in IT and digital and payroll administrator.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

Leaders and staff maintained the same curriculum throughout the period when providers were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions, even though approximately 80 per cent of apprentices were furloughed. Trainers and mentors moved to online teaching at the start of the pandemic to support the agreed end dates for apprentices. Leaders and staff report that this was a 'seamless' process, and the avoidance of travel offered more time to focus on online teaching. This is regarded as a success by apprentices and employers.

Leaders have reduced class sizes and apprentices now have a blend of classroom and online learning to support their progress. The teaching of knowledge units online, supported by trainers and mentors, allowed apprentices to make progress. Trainers have continued to respond to the pandemic by preparing apprentices for a second period of restrictions.

Leaders and staff recognise that apprentices' mental health has been adversely affected by the pandemic and furlough. As a result, they hold frequent meetings to discuss these issues and work with apprentices to provide appropriate support.

For accountancy apprentices, the move to online learning was smooth because they were already a well-established group. IT and digital apprentices needed more support and encouragement to participate in online sessions. Apprentices are positive about the support they receive from their mentors and trainers and the flexibility offered by online learning to continue their studies.

Local businesses are employing apprentices to manage their furlough schemes and to support staff working from home. Leaders at EMA have been able to assist this by recruiting more apprentices. Employers welcome the one-minute videos that potential apprentices are producing prior to their interviews. Leaders see this as an opportunity for future development.

**What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Leaders recognise the benefits of online learning and have provided additional training and support to staff. This includes the involvement of a local university to share good practice. Leaders recognise the need to keep the social aspects of learning through online quizzes, and they encourage apprentices' interaction.

During the pandemic, trainers monitored apprentices' participation in online learning and contacted those not logged online by a specific time. This information was shared with mentors and employers to safeguard apprentices' progress and welfare. Staff continue to offer academic and pastoral support to those apprentices who are still furloughed and have provided more extensive project work for these apprentices to complete.

Leaders and staff are aware that online learning does not support comprehensive practical skills development and have recognised the need to focus on a blend of online learning with classroom and workplace activities. The integration of these teaching methods is now an ongoing project.

Leaders and staff ensure that apprentices have the necessary technology to learn online and to undertake assessments. For example, apprentices' final assessments are being prepared for a technology-based approach. Apprentices provide their work to assessors electronically and professional discussions are completed online. Staff report that this requires less travel and set-up time for assessors and trainers.

Trainers and mentors state that they are able to use online training more flexibly and effectively to support apprentices who have difficulties in completing training modules or attending sessions. Although learning has now returned to classrooms, managers have continued with remote mentoring and believe that this model is working well to support apprentices' well-being.

Managers are looking at ways to further enrich the curriculum, for example by creating COVID-19-related projects. Managers continue to provide careers advice and guidance during this time.

**How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

A full risk assessment is used by staff to review how the curriculum is taught in the light of COVID-19. On return to classroom-based learning, apprentices are introduced to the wide range of COVID-19 precautions and measures, safeguarding updates, along with national and local risks. A recent online session led by a cybersecurity expert was focused on keeping safe online. These issues are also discussed at the start of the apprenticeship course.

Following the move to remote training, online safety and mental health awareness during the pandemic gained greater prominence. Trainers routinely share videos on topics such as cyber-bullying, and other broader safeguarding issues are covered at the end of training days, which apprentices appreciate.

Trainers complete monthly well-being assessments of apprentices and then identify concerns. Mentors provide additional support online and intervene where there are concerns. Managers have introduced online deep relaxation sessions and are continuing to use these to support apprentices who are experiencing examination anxiety.

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