

N-Gaged Ltd

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	1270866
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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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

N-Gaged Training is based in Bristol. It specialises in training unemployed adults to gain the skills to secure employment in local priority sectors. The courses offered are principally in care, transportation, logistics and construction.

Learners follow a learning 'pathway' lasting six weeks, specific to an occupational area. Each pathway comprises one or more discrete courses, the shortest being two weeks. One hundred and twenty-eight adult learners are studying courses at either entry level 3, level 1 or 2. Learners can start pathways on a weekly basis.

Thirty-seven apprentices are following standards-based apprenticeships; the majority of these are in large goods vehicle driving or supply and warehousing.

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 took action immediately after lockdown to stop providing all of their classroom-based curriculum, until then the mainstay of all teaching. They then established a small staff team to identify a suitable virtual learning platform and set-up online learning programmes. Leaders believe that the curriculum now in place is effective, although they reflect that it is the outcome of several months of trial and error. They also recognise that elements of the online curriculum are still a work in progress, such as the materials for teaching functional skills.

Most learners are positive about the move to online learning. Leaders had anticipated implementing a blend of online and classroom-based learning by the year's end. The second wave of COVID-19 has put that plan on hold.

Most learners are referred to N-Gaged training courses by local job centres, housing associations and charities. N-Gaged staff's contact with these organisations declined sharply during lockdown. This greatly reduced the number of learners who could benefit from training. Staff have now reinstated their contacts and learner numbers have risen progressively during the past three months. Stakeholders comment that N-Gaged's courses are planned and tailored to meet local market needs.

Leaders recognise that online learning does not work in respect of practical courses, such as fork lift truck driving and transportation. Leaders have changed their approach to these face-to-face learning/teaching sessions to keep learners safe. This includes setting up a dedicated examination centre so learners do not have to enter N-Gaged's main building.

Teachers and leaders say that the quality of learners' work has improved as a result of the online teaching system. They believe this is because learners can now access a greater range of online resources, and can learn at their own pace and in their own time. Learners comment that their learning now does not finish when a teaching session ends.

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?

Most learners have told leaders that the online learning platform is easy to use, and they have improved their confidence in working digitally. Teachers have seen that learners who were unwilling to speak out in classrooms often find their voice during online teaching sessions. However, they also note that some learners are cautious about going online, such as those who have recently become unemployed after a long time in work. Whatever each learner's prior experience or digital competence, tutors are supporting all of them to further develop their confidence in learning online. In the process, tutors feel they are gaining learners' trust.

Leaders, in so far as they can, have changed to portfolio-based assessment for all their courses instead of a final examination. They note how this has reduced students' anxiety levels. Tutors feel they have more time to teach the employability and specialist work skills which learners need for work, rather than just teaching them how to pass a test. Overall, they reflect that learners' attendance appears to have improved, as has the number completing and achieving their qualification.

Staff have been able to develop their own digital expertise through in-house training. They feel well supported, particularly valuing the technical assistance given by their work 'buddies' and from staff in the parent company, ICCA Holdings.

Leaders' quality assurance processes include reviewing the standard of online assessments, checking that tutors have made contact with learners at least twice a week and reviewing learners' completed work. Leaders assess learners' progress each week and identify whether any need additional support. They review

differences in attainment and progress between groups of learners. From this they have identified that some learners take longer to complete courses due to the number of assessments required by the online programme. This led to a review of trainers' caseloads to ensure that they had sufficient time to provide support.

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

During the pandemic, N-Gaged's leaders have maintained a focus on keeping learners safe. Seven trained designated safeguarding leads are in post. They maintain links with local authorities, for example referring concerns about learners to authorities' multi-agency safeguarding hubs. All staff receive appropriate safeguarding training on a minimum annual basis. This training includes a specific focus on raising staff and learners' awareness of how to stay safe when online.

Learning engagement officers (LEOs) discuss safeguarding themes with each learner during the course induction. Learners then receive a safeguarding handbook including contact telephone numbers. LEOs record any concerns about a learner and report any concerns. Tutors must make contact with their learners at least twice a week and communicate any safeguarding concerns directly to relevant senior managers for further action.

During teaching sessions, tutors discuss safeguarding themes with learners, such as maintaining good mental health and well-being. Learners say they feel safe with, and value the support from, tutors.

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