

Veolia Environmental Development Centre Limited

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Ian Higgins, HMI

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Type of provider: Employer

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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 in this period, including those 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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

Veolia Environmental Development Centre Limited (Veolia) operates within Veolia UK, which is part of the global Veolia Group. Veolia UK deliver waste, water, and energy services across the country. The training is managed from a head office in Cannock, Staffordshire.

At the time of the inspection, there were 148 apprentices. Just under 35% of these were studying the level 3 team leader/supervisor standard. Exactly 25% of apprentices were studying the level 5 operations/departmental manager standard. Around 15% of apprentices were studying either the level 2 driving goods vehicle (LGV) standard or the level 3 business administration standard. Some 8% of apprentices were studying the level 2 waste operative standard, with the remaining few apprentices on the level 2 customer service standard.

The provider does not use subcontractors.

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 told inspectors that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has so far been minimal. As key workers, almost all apprentices continued in their job roles. Just under 10% of apprentices were furloughed; half of these have now returned.

Plans were in place before COVID-19 to move to mainly online teaching. The initial period of national COVID-19 restrictions accelerated this move. Veolia has invested in a new online learning platform. Teaching has been through the use of virtual classrooms and additional one-to-one sessions through online communication. Where apprentices did not have access to information technology equipment, they have been provided with tablet devices. Apprentices appreciate the flexibility of online learning and enjoy being able to access learning around their job commitments.

Senior leaders have continued to work with organisations such as end-point assessment organisations and awarding bodies. Almost all apprentices who reached their end-point assessment have completed their programme. Leaders continue to work with organisations to support apprentices to complete assessments; for example, to allow apprentices to complete remote functional skills assessments securely. Veolia continues to communicate with sector bodies and other providers to seek support with their ongoing response to the pandemic.

A new process of 'learning walks' is now in place as a result of moving to online delivery. Leaders now have much more access to visit sessions remotely than they did through travelling to physical sites across the country. Specialists receive feedback after each learning walk and have targets set where needed.

On a few apprenticeship standards some challenges remain. For example, apprentices on the driving goods vehicle (LGV) standard face delays in being able to take their external driving assessments. Where Veolia faces these challenges, specialists reorder the curriculum so that apprentices continue to develop their knowledge and skills.

Careers, advice and guidance have continued during the pandemic. Senior leaders shared how apprenticeships support the business and its commitment to people 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?

Specialists adapted the curriculum as teaching moved online. They worked with apprentices, senior leaders and line managers to do this. For example, on the level 5 departmental manager apprenticeship, teaching sessions are shorter and more frequent. On the level 3 business administration apprenticeship, specialists are experimenting with virtual work shadowing. This allows apprentices to continue to experience the full range of settings in which Veolia operates while face-to-face site visits are not taking place.

At the start of the pandemic specialists received training to support them to develop online learning. For example, they received training on how to use online quizzes to support assessment. Specialists reported how they are continuing to develop their teaching. For example, specialists on the LGV apprenticeship are beginning to record

live question-and-answer sessions, so that apprentices who are experiencing delays to their driver assessments can revisit their theory learning.

The new online learning system is supporting specialists to track apprentices' progress. Apprentices undertake regular skills assessments. These are used to identify gaps in apprentices' knowledge. Specialists provide additional support through one-to-one sessions. They revisit topics where needed. The line managers of apprentices say that they feel more informed on the progress that apprentices are making. Leaders indicated that staff at all levels of Veolia have adapted well to the move to online teaching.

The attendance and engagement of apprentices remain high. Those apprentices who had mainly face-to-face teaching before the pandemic have been supported to make sure they have a safe space in which to learn remotely. Apprentices have received tips on how best to learn from home. Specialists include well-being sections in their sessions, where apprentices can speak with their peers. Some specialists use yoga and movement during their sessions to promote the importance of balancing learning with being active.

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

Staff have received safeguarding training, including training about staying safe when working online. Some staff are now trained as mental health first aiders. Apprentices and staff receive news updates through a 'virtual community'. This includes updates about measures that are in place to keep staff and apprentices safe.

The induction that apprentices receive has been revisited. There is a focus on Veolia's employer assistance programme and advice on mental health and well-being.

Leaders and specialists have regular contact with apprentices. The move to online learning has provided them with extra time to talk to apprentices on a one-to-one basis. The small number of apprentices that were furloughed had weekly well-being calls with their line manager.

Apprentices told inspectors that there are a range of safety measures in place when they access sites. For example, for apprentices completing driving training, the number of people allowed in the vehicle has been reduced to promote social distancing.

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