

Skills for Security Limited

Interim visit report

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

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

Skills for Security Limited is an independent learning provider founded in 2002. It provides apprenticeship training nationally. At the time of the visit, 230 apprentices were on level 3 standards-based apprenticeships in areas including fire emergency and security systems and team leading/supervision.

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 decided to stop face-to-face teaching before COVID-19 restrictions came into force to give trainers and apprentices sufficient time to plan and adapt a curriculum that could be taught remotely.

Managers said that staff received the requisite training to use a variety of online communication and assessment tools. They also enabled trainers to update their subject knowledge and that of wider topics such as mental health awareness. Consequently, the provider was able to continue training activities throughout the period of restrictions. Leaders commented that their governors have provided useful support and advice to help them navigate the current challenges.

Employers said that they were well informed about trainers' plans for teaching the curriculum so that apprentices could continue with their learning. They described how well trainers had used interesting learning materials to engage apprentices and teach them how to use technology for learning.

Employers receive weekly updates on apprentices' assessment feedback. They say they know exactly the progress of their apprentices and liaise routinely with trainers to ensure that apprentices receive the help needed to keep on top of their work. For example, trainers provided apprentices with additional workshops on 'system servicing' to help them remember protocols and regulations.

Overall, leaders say that their curriculum plans enable most apprentices to continue with their studies, with only a few struggling to access appropriate technology. However, they accept that – when returning to work – a small minority of apprentices did not attend learning sessions. As a result, leaders developed an 'unengaged tracking register' to enable them to monitor and support those apprentices who had fallen behind with their work.

Leaders recognise that – as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions – an increasing proportion of apprentices cannot complete their apprenticeship on time because end-point assessment organisations do not have the capacity to meet the demand for apprentices' final assessments.

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 use an online monitoring system to record apprentices' progress. On starting their course, apprentices receive an appraisal of their skills and of their future career aims. Leaders described how they use this information to tailor the curriculum better to meet the needs of apprentices and their employers.

Leaders say that they check routinely the quality of trainers' teaching skills by observing their sessions, evaluating the quality of apprentices' work, and listening to apprentices' feedback. Now that trainers record those lessons taught remotely, they share their experiences to develop their teaching practice.

Managers have used specialist assessment software to allow them to identify information about apprentices' starting points and needs. They identified quickly that it would be a challenge for apprentices, who preferred more face-to-face interaction, to learn remotely for long periods. Managers say that the software helped trainers to plan more helpful learning activities to develop apprentices' skills in areas such as time management, motivation, confidence, and their concentration.

Trainers described the challenge of adapting a mainly practical curriculum to one suitable for remote learning. Initially, they taught apprentices theory topics while investigating the capability to access a variety of fire and security systems remotely. As a result, apprentices – using a mix of video, audio, and programming skills – were able to configure and troubleshoot remotely security alarm installations in real-time. Trainers say that apprentices make good progress when using this learning approach and therefore they will continue to use this method in the future.

Trainers discovered that not all learners had access to technology, including devices with a licenced word processor, to complete their work. They overcame this barrier by converting documents to online forms, which all learners could access via a web browser.

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

Leaders described how they made sure that all learners, including those requiring additional support, had access to the appropriate resources for remote learning. They ensured apprentices received advice in relation to health and well-being, dealing with bereavement, and the dangers of online gambling.

Leaders and trainers noted that – because of moving from face-to-face to remote learning – apprentices were more reluctant to discuss any concerns with their tutors. To overcome this, trainers said that they increased one-to-one communication with apprentices, particularly for those who had been identified as at risk of disengaging from their learning or needing more pastoral support.

Trainers discussed how they were kept up to date with topics such as mental health and developed new 'desk aids' for learners, who use this information to demonstrate their understanding during reviews.

Apprentices feel they know how to keep safe online, how to access support or to report a concern.

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