

TheLightbulb Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 53032

Name of lead inspector: Michael Worgs, HMI

Visit date(s): 28 to 29 October 2020

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

TheLightBulb Limited is based in Basildon. They mainly work with employers throughout Essex, East London and the Thames Gateway. At the time of the visit most of the 168 apprentices were studying level 3 apprenticeships. Of these, 147 apprentices are on standards-based apprenticeships. Around half study level 3 business administration and level 2 customer services apprenticeship standards. Two thirds of the apprentices are aged 23 years and under. TheLightBulb Limited does not work with any 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 say that the apprenticeship curriculum has not been significantly affected by the pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, leaders reviewed the capacity of their systems. This was to see if they would cope with all staff and apprentices moving to working remotely online. They purchased new equipment for staff, such as mobile phones and office furniture, so that staff could work from home. They also loaned apprentices laptops to ensure that they could carry on learning.

Leaders reviewed what they needed to do to make the curriculum learning resources more accessible to apprentices online. Learning development mentors (LDMs) created digital resources, such as videos and podcasts. As a result, apprentices had a wider range of different interactive resources to support them learning online.

Leaders had planned to return to face-to-face teaching in September 2020. However, due to the significant impact of the pandemic on staff, apprentices and their families, they made the decision to continue with online learning. Their continued priority is the well-being of staff and apprentices.

Leaders recognised that they needed additional middle manager capacity to ensure the smooth running of the business. They employed two director designates in September 2020. Their role is to develop and maintain the curriculum in preparation for any future local restrictions.

Leaders say there has been a significant shift in the age group of apprentices being enrolled. Two thirds are now aged 23 years and under. This is in contrast to last year when apprentices were mainly over 23 years old. Leaders are only working with employers who have a job role situated in the workplace rather than online. This is to ensure that new apprentices are supported appropriately.

Employers report that LDMs have been creative with assessing apprentices to keep them developing new skills and knowledge in the time expected of the qualification. Employers value the regular communication and planning with the LDMs throughout the pandemic and beyond.

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 say they are undertaking more regular, shorter online observations of staff. They can therefore use their time more efficiently to support LDMs to adapt learning materials for online learning.

LDMs have had to change the order of subjects taught. This is partly due to changes made by awarding organisations for assessment of learning. Staff say the changes have been successful and that apprentices are continuing to learn and pass their courses, despite fewer opportunities to develop skills while working remotely.

LDMs collaborate on the resources they develop for their different qualifications, for example sharing management materials to enhance units taught on health and social care courses. LDMs value being able to share resources and ideas of how to teach online. They are much more confident in using a wider range of technology to communicate.

LDMs identified that apprentices on some standards qualifications would struggle to evidence their competence when not in a normal work environment. As a result, they have developed learning resources to help apprentices produce valid evidence for assessments. For example, apprentices use case studies to demonstrate the impact of their new knowledge using realistic work place scenarios.

LDMs are more confident in using a wider range of assessment methods to ensure that apprentices can evidence their learning and demonstrate competence. For example, employers now provide witness testimonies in place of an assessor observing an apprentice. This has improved the employers' understanding and knowledge of what apprentices need to learn to complete the apprenticeship.

Leaders work closely with employers and external agencies to ensure that apprentices receive advice about their next steps and career options. LDMs continue to offer careers advice and guidance to apprentices during regular reviews.

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

Leaders say staff and apprentices have completed safeguarding and wider online safety training as a result of the pandemic. Staff and apprentices have completed a 'returning to work' COVID-19 safety training online. LDMs complete risk assessments with apprentices and employers to ensure apprentices are working safely.

LDMs report that the leaders' priority is the well-being of staff and apprentices. LDMs maintain more frequent contact with apprentices using different mediums. They frequently reinforce how to stay safe online. For example, the precautions apprentices need to take when using social media and when gaming online.

Apprentices say they feel safe. They are aware of what they need to do at work and home to keep themselves safe. For example, they ensure they do not give out personal data or accept emails from unknown sources.

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