

The Development Fund Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 2495131

Name of lead inspector: Emma Woods HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: St Margaret's Bus Station
Gravel Street
Leicester
LE1 3AG

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.

Information about the provider

The Development Fund Limited (TDF) was established in 2005 to provide training for workers in the passenger transport industry. In April 2017, TDF became an independent learning provider. It receives funding through the apprenticeship levy. All apprentices study apprenticeships in travel consultancy. At the time of the visit, there were five apprentices who were all at the end of their apprenticeship awaiting their final assessments.

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 managers have faced a range of challenges during the COVID-19 restrictions. The most significant challenge was the employer that TDF's apprentices worked for ceased trading. As a result, all apprentices were made redundant.

Apprentices are all at the end of their apprenticeship, with only the final assessments to be completed. Leaders and managers have taken steps to make sure they are supported to undertake these. Managers, working with assessors, set out individual plans for each apprentice to prepare them for their final assessments. They also provide computers to apprentices who do not have access to them so they can complete the online tests.

Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, leaders and managers were strategically changing the courses they offer from travel consultancy to the transport industry. This builds on the long-standing partnerships leaders have with bus companies. The pandemic has slowed progress with some of this development. Courses will be specifically targeted for bus drivers nationally, which is a priority area for the transport industry.

Leaders have invested in a bus to deliver this training. They also intend to use it to provide information, advice and guidance to those who may seek a career as a bus driver. They are yet to directly recruit apprentices to these programmes but have commenced some related courses funded by other providers.

Leaders and managers have invested in new software to support teaching remotely. A new online learning platform and video conferencing technology will be available to future apprentices. Staff train using the platform which includes completing online courses in equality and diversity and lean management. They say this helps them to understand what it is like to learn online and supports them to develop their own teaching practice.

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?

Managers and assessors changed how they worked with apprentices early in the pandemic. They were unable to visit workplaces as apprentices were too busy supporting customers affected by travel restrictions. Assessors carried out one-to-one sessions in the evenings to enable apprentices to continue to prepare for their final assessments.

After apprentices were made redundant, assessors continued to work with them to prepare them for their final assessments. Assessors have adapted mock final assessments so they take place over the telephone. New revision sheets are emailed and discussed with apprentices to help them to prepare. Assessors make weekly contact with apprentices by using email and video conferencing packages to review how they are progressing with their revision.

Assessors take a flexible approach to meet the needs of apprentices whose circumstances have changed as a result of being made redundant. For example, they made arrangements with awarding bodies for apprentices who have moved abroad to undertake their final assessments despite distance and time difference challenges. Inspectors spoke with apprentices who felt very well supported by managers and assessors.

Leaders and managers say that apprentices who have continued their studies have achieved well. Experienced assessors provide careers guidance and support to apprentices. For example, they offer industry specific coaching sessions on curriculum vitae writing and interview techniques. This has supported a few apprentices to gain jobs with other travel companies.

Quality reviews continue to take place virtually and managers provide assessors with developmental actions for their practice on things such as feedback to apprentices. Assessors value the extra well-being support provided by managers during the COVID-19 restrictions. They say that the frequency of one-to-ones have increased.

They find this support from managers helpful in reassuring them about new ways of working when they no longer meet in person.

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

Leaders and managers report that all relevant policies were updated at the start of the COVID-19 restrictions. As the head office closed, leaders and managers invested in a dedicated safeguarding telephone line that could be used by apprentices and staff at any time.

Once training moved to online learning, leaders ensured that staff completed further training in 'cyber awareness'. Assessors said this was useful as it allowed them to confidently train apprentices in online safety. Apprentices say the training helps them to understand more about staying safe online. For example, apprentices spoke about the importance of using a secure video conferencing platform when they complete online interviews.

Apprentices are confident they know who to speak to if they have any concerns for themselves or a peer. They feel able to talk to their assessor or one of the managers and value the support they receive.

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