

Serco Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54333
Name of lead inspector:	Andy Fitt HMI
Visit date(s):	11-12 November 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 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

Serco Limited (Serco) manages over 500 contracts worldwide. Since the previous inspection in March 2018, leaders have moved employer-delivered apprenticeships to a separate part of the business (Serco Holdings Limited). Serco now offers level 4 school business professional, level 5 operational manager and level 3 teaching assistant apprenticeships. Serco also oversees adult skills for work (ASW) education programmes in the West Midlands, working with seven subcontractors. All learners at Serco are aged 19 or above, with the large majority aged over 25. At the time of the visit there were 290 adult learners and 99 apprentices, with most apprentices enrolled on the level 4 apprenticeship.

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 explained how they had examined and adapted the curriculum for both their apprenticeship and ASW programmes. They talked about how they had reviewed leadership and governance as a result of the changes they had made to their business. Leaders and managers in subcontractors explained the steps that they had taken to help ASW learners struggling with access to computers and the internet; posting work to them and helping them to get grants for equipment. They spoke about how they had modified the curriculum for those on courses such as building and construction and engineering. They explained how learners concentrated on the

theory aspects of their subjects while working remotely and then developed their practical skills later when businesses reopened. Staff at subcontractors talked about how they had made sure that all learners now start their courses by learning about online safety, mental health and digital skills to prepare them for their remote lessons.

Apprenticeship leaders explained how they had used government research to inform them about the ongoing needs of school business professionals. They talked with professional bodies, employers and apprentices to find out and meet employers' needs as a result of the pandemic. Leaders talked about how they had adapted course materials to include more information about precautions schools should take because of COVID-19. They explained how they helped apprentices to understand the many changes to government legislation.

Staff added more information about well-being and resilience into learning materials to support apprentices. Apprenticeship staff explained how they frequently review the curriculum to ensure that it is up to date and fit for purpose in light of changes to government legislation.

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 and managers told us how they had helped staff to improve their competence and confidence when working and teaching remotely. Staff who were not experienced or confident with technology told us how they now felt more assured about teaching remotely because of the support they had received.

Managers and staff told us about leaders' frequent observations of remote lessons. Staff spoke about how the feedback they received from these observations helped them to improve their teaching skills. Staff explained how a new electronic monitoring system had enhanced the ways they check learners' progress. They spoke about how they had continued to inform learners about their next steps after completing their studies. Managers of subcontracted provision appreciate the frequent meetings they have with leaders at Serco which help them review the quality of teaching and progress of learners.

Leaders, managers and staff spoke proudly of learners' professionalism, resilience and commitment to their studies despite the problems of the pandemic. Staff and employers recognise that the progress of a few learners has slowed because of the pandemic. Staff described how they identified vulnerable learners and those at risk of falling behind. Staff contacted them frequently to make sure they were mentally and physically well and making progress with their studies. Staff explained how these learners attended face-to-face sessions from June onwards to help them catch up.

They spoke about the benefits for themselves and learners of teaching remotely. For example, learners welcomed recorded lessons that they could watch at convenient times. Staff explained how they found it easier to check learners' progress when they were completing all their work online. Despite these benefits, leaders told us how much learners were looking forward to returning to more face-to-face teaching as they had missed the social interaction of the classroom.

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

Leaders told us how they shared information about staying safe online and mental well-being with staff and learners to support them during the pandemic. They explained how they now contact learners, employers and subcontractors more frequently to identify safeguarding concerns and share new information about safety.

Staff described their recent refresher training in safeguarding. They told us about the changes that they had made to improve the safety of learners. For example, leaders have added information about staying safe to their website and updated information to help learners identify fake news and phishing.

Learners that we talked with told us about the precautions staff had taken to ensure that learners are safe when they come on site. Learners explained how they learned about safeguarding during induction and how staff questioned and reminded them about staying safe during online lessons. They knew who to contact if they had safeguarding concerns.

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