

Anderson Stockley Accredited Training Ltd

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Helen Whelan, Her Majesty's Inspector

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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.

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

Anderson Stockley Accredited Training Limited was established in 1993 and has been an accredited training provider since 2000, offering training and development programmes to the NHS and private sector. The company has held a contract with the Education and Skills Funding Agency since July 2013. Apprentices study dental nursing and the majority are employed in the east of England and the Midlands. At the time of the visit, there were 115 apprentices following a level 3 standards-based dental nursing apprenticeship. Of these, 42 apprentices were 16 to 18 years old, 52 were 19 to 23 years old and 19 were 24 years and above. Two apprentices are currently taking a break in their learning.

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?

COVID-19 restrictions accelerated managers' plans to move to online teaching and assessment. This was primarily due to the closure of dental practices, and the halt of face-to-face meetings and observations of apprentices in the workplace. Before this, educational practitioners used wholly paper-based assessment methods and face-to-face teaching.

The awarding organisation made adaptations to assessment rules to allow the use of witness testimony and remote assessment methods. All apprentices are still able to develop their practical skills in the workplace, but assessment by educational practitioners is not yet permitted as the dental sector is still classed as high-risk in terms of COVID-19.

Educational practitioners are using this time to provide apprentices with theory-based lessons. Lessons are delivered online and recorded so they can be used for revision purposes. Apprentices' responses to mock examination papers and professional discussions are used to gauge their understanding of topics.

Apprentices' examinations were put on hold in March until remote online testing was introduced in June. This caused a backlog of apprentices waiting to sit examinations, but managers report that this has now been cleared.

A relatively small number of apprentices have been furloughed. If apprentices' participation waned during this time, managers worked closely with employers to provide support. This included practical tips for studying remotely, or bite-size targets for apprentices to achieve. Managers say apprentices are engaging well with their training, particularly since dental practices reopened from June.

The support and expertise offered by staff is highly valued by employers. Staff are keen to work with employers to help apprentices improve their practice in the workplace, for example helping them to be more interactive with patients. Employers report that apprentices are progressing well and making a valuable contribution to their dental practices, often showing high degrees of motivation and commitment.

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 recognise that online assessment and tracking was critical to support apprentices to continue learning during the restrictions. Employers, managers and educational practitioners all have access to the system which allows apprentices' progress to be closely monitored. A small number of apprentices, who are near the end of their course, still use a paper-based system. Staff support these apprentices in the same way, although work is submitted via email or post.

Managers explain that the restrictions gave staff the opportunity to review their courses. Educational practitioners identify monthly assessment opportunities in course plans and support apprentices' independent learning with interactive resources. Apprentices particularly enjoy checking their learning by using revision flash cards on the online platform. Mock exams are also made available. Educational practitioners monitor apprentices' results closely and use them to identify gaps in apprentices' learning. Additional support is provided to help secure apprentices' knowledge and understanding.

The dental quality manager keeps senior managers informed of apprentices' progress and undertakes a range of quality assurance activities. These include accessing the online platform to evaluate the quality of educational practitioners' progress reviews, sampling assessed work and reviewing recorded lessons. Managers are satisfied that teaching, learning and assessment is to the standard they expect.

Careers advice and guidance has taken place remotely. Staff describe how they ensure dental nurses have an understanding of potential progression routes, for example working as a hygienist, dental technologist or radiographer.

Educational practitioners have maintained the schedule of individual training and progress review meetings with apprentices. Attendance is monitored by an online calendar system that provides reports to managers. Managers also analyse any cancellations that apprentices make, so trends can be identified, and support put in place. Managers report that apprentices' attendance has remained high.

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

Managers are mindful of the risks apprentices may have faced due to the restrictions and have updated safeguarding and well-being policies accordingly. When restrictions were first introduced, staff made weekly contact with apprentices to check on their well-being and close contact has been maintained. Overall, apprentices are said to have been resilient and coped well.

All staff are trained in mental health awareness and a mental health first-aider sends out monthly updates to apprentices about the importance of good mental health. Apprentices told inspectors that educational practitioners check on their welfare before the start of each lesson, and that apprentices know how to escalate concerns and get support.

Managers have placed more emphasis on online safety. Staff have alerted apprentices to the dangers of cybercrime, the importance of only accessing secure websites and using social media safely.

All staff receive updates on safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty, and educational practitioners use monthly progress reviews to explore these issues with apprentices.

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