

N & B Training Company Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	53446
Name of lead inspector:	Carolyn Brownsea, 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

N & B Training Company Limited (N & B Training) is a regional independent learning provider based in Farnham in Surrey. The company is owned and run by a managing director, supported by a senior management team. It has apprentices mainly in the south east.

N & B Training offers apprenticeships at levels 2 and 3, and 5. The majority of apprentices are enrolled on standards-based apprenticeships. At the time of the interim visit, there were 59 apprentices working towards apprenticeships in business and administration at level 3, team leading at level 3, management at level 5, early years at levels 2 and 3, and customer service at level 2.

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 told inspectors how they responded swiftly to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They prioritised the safety of staff and apprentices, while making sure that learning continued.

Leaders and managers report that the pandemic accelerated their plans to transfer to online learning. They explained that they have focused on creating and updating teaching resources. The transition has had several positive benefits, including the refinement of induction processes to check that apprentices are on the correct course.

Employers are positive about the development of the curriculum and how N & B Training staff have minimised the impact of COVID-19 on apprentices' progress. Training staff are accommodating and work with employers and apprentices to ensure that apprentices continue to make at least expected progress. The small minority of apprentices who have fallen behind in their learning are supported to catch up and complete within planned timescales. Employers report that their apprentices are valued members of staff who make a difference to their businesses as a result of their apprenticeship.

Managers described the benefits of online reviews for both apprentices and their employers. These reviews have improved employers' awareness of apprenticeships and apprentices' progress. Managers report that they have increased their understanding of the needs of employers and apprentices.

Managers discussed how they monitor apprentices' progress. They report that apprentices have made good, and often better, progress as COVID-19 restrictions have provided more opportunities to focus on learning. Apprentices are supported to develop good learning habits. They complete training in time management to assist them in planning and managing their learning workload.

Managers explained their work with awarding bodies to agree alternative sources of evidence for assessments. As a result, apprentices are now able to use employers' witness testimonies and reflective evaluations of their progress to evidence their skills and competencies.

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, managers and staff described the swift transition from face-to-face to remote teaching at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They report that moving teaching and learning online was completed with minimal disruption and apprentices remained engaged and motivated.

Managers and staff value the support and training provided to develop their skills in online teaching and assessment. Staff report that the training and opportunities to share good practice have given them the necessary skills and confidence to teach remotely.

Managers, staff and employers told inspectors that apprentices have responded positively to online learning. Staff described how apprentices are attending well, developing strong work habits and completing high-quality work. Staff attribute this to the flexibility of online learning and the speed of feedback from staff.

Apprentices speak enthusiastically about their experiences of remote learning. They value the quality of resources, support from staff and how learning online helps them balance their learning with personal and work commitments.

Managers told us that training staff focused on theory and how apprentices might apply their learning in their workplace during the first COVID-19 restrictions. They explained how the crisis caused issues in apprentices' workplaces, resulting in apprentices having fewer opportunities to link knowledge to skills and behaviours. In response, staff now use professional discussions more frequently to assess apprentices' knowledge and understanding.

Staff discussed how the changes in working practices due to the pandemic have further improved communication with employers. Staff explained that employers have greater awareness of apprentices' progress and the actions needed to further support their development of new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Staff speak with apprentices to monitor their well-being and progress frequently. They told us how they have supported vulnerable apprentices, including those on furlough and the small number who are unemployed. They described how those without regular access to computers or the internet are supported to continue learning using paper-based resources.

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

Leaders prioritise the safeguarding and well-being of staff and apprentices. Employers are positive about the support and care provided for their apprentices. Leaders and managers have introduced 'hot topic' discussions that include topics such as online safety training, online extremism and professional online conduct. Staff explained how they used discussions to talk about fake news, safe use of social media and 'catfishing' with apprentices.

Apprentices complete safeguarding training. They reflect on their learning to identify how they will apply their knowledge to their lives and job roles. Discussions with assessors help apprentices to understand the consequence of actions such as the sharing of inappropriate pictures. Apprentices value the resources that enable them to explore these topics in greater detail.

Leaders report that the small minority of identified causes for concern relate to apprentices' mental health and well-being issues. Apprentices benefit from tailored guidance to help them access support that meets their needs.

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