

The Apprenticeship College Ltd

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	1274676
Name of lead inspector:	Gayle Saundry, Her Majesty's Inspector
Visit dates:	10 to 11 December 2020
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	258 Harrow Road London W2 5ES

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 apprentices, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of apprentices in this period, including those 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 apprentices.

Information about the provider

The Apprenticeship College Limited (the college), previously known as the London College of Apprenticeship Training, is an apprenticeship provider based in Paddington, central London. The Apprenticeship College began teaching apprenticeships in May 2017. It teaches apprentices nationally, with the highest numbers being in London and the East Midlands.

At the time of the visit, the college had 541 apprentices studying a range of standards between levels 2 and 5. The majority of apprentices are on the level 3 team leader/supervisor standard and the level 5 operations departmental manager standard. The college works with subcontractor Maguire Business Solutions who teach some of the provider's apprenticeship training components.

What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of apprentices and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?

In advance of the national restrictions in March 2020, leaders made a substantial financial investment into redesigning their curriculum, ready to be taught online. Their preparations allowed them to begin teaching lessons online as soon as was necessary. Leaders feel that their online teaching is of high quality, and they intend to continue to include at least some online teaching in their programmes in the future.

Leaders have altered the range of subjects they offer this year in light of feedback from employers and their analysis of the current labour market. In particular, they have noted an increase in demand for supply chain expertise due to the change in peoples' shopping habits during the pandemic. To meet this need, leaders have introduced a level 3 supply chain practitioner standard, working with their stakeholders to design a curriculum that meets the current needs of employers. Their new programme has helped to increase the number of new apprentices enrolling

with the college after leaders saw a fall in enrolments, and therefore funding, during the pandemic. Leaders next intend to introduce a level 5 coaching standard to broaden the number of future pathways on offer to their level 3 apprentices.

Leaders report that the opportunity to study from home and the flexibility of attending lessons at different times has led to an increase in attendance of their apprentices. However, a small proportion of their apprentices have lost their jobs this year and have disengaged from their learning.

Leaders recognised the importance of caring for their staff during what has been a difficult year. They had informal conversations daily with staff to pick up any issues that they could resolve. They held staff social events, such as online scavenger hunts, to encourage their team to remain positive and connected.

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 apprentices?

In March 2020, leaders introduced a new approach to teaching while moving their lessons online. Trainers previously taught lessons over three hours, followed by independent work for apprentices to complete. However, in June, following feedback from apprentices, trainers and employers, leaders amended their approach. They now teach six-hour online workshops and set apprentices fewer independent written tasks.

Trainers have changed the order and way in which they teach and assess some elements of their course. Where apprentices have been furloughed and have additional time to spend on their learning, trainers have increased their teaching of knowledge-based topics. They have also sought witness testimonies of apprentices' work from employers where they have been unable to observe apprentices in the workplace.

Leaders have met frequently since moving online, to review the quality of their training and identify areas of potential improvement to their work. Leaders found that apprentices were struggling with their online mathematics examinations as they were unable to practise using the software required in advance of their assessments. Leaders changed to a different examination body who were able to offer apprentices access to their software in advance.

Trainers report that they use a variety of teaching techniques to make their online lessons interesting and engaging, for instance using quizzes and polls to assess apprentices' knowledge. Leaders and trainers have worked together to bring the 'theatre performance' elements of their teaching online. Through video conferencing, professional actors perform scripted scenes set in the context of the apprentices' workplace, for example performing a scene in which a bus driver has to tackle discrimination at work.

Trainers and skills coaches work together to identify any apprentices who are at risk of falling behind, and update employers once per month so that they can offer additional support to their employees. Where necessary, trainers hold additional group and individual sessions online to help apprentices catch up.

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

Leaders report that skills coaches have contacted apprentices more frequently during the pandemic. Leaders support any apprentice who is struggling by helping them to identify the support available through their employer, for instance access to the employee assistance programme.

During induction, leaders teach apprentices about safeguarding and who to contact if they feel unsafe. However, apprentices do not clearly recall what they learned during their induction. More recently, leaders have provided apprentices with information on topics, such as how to work from home and online safety, through apprentices' electronic portfolios.

Leaders encourage skills coaches to be empathetic and sympathetic to the needs of apprentices during the pandemic. They have seen an increase in low-level anxiety in apprentices, some of whom are working in organisations which are experiencing financial stress, and who may be facing furlough or redundancy. Leaders feel they have more work to do, to know how best to support apprentices in these circumstances.

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