

QUBE Qualifications and Development Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54038
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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

Qube Qualifications and Development Ltd, operating as Qube Learning (Qube), is a privately-owned national training provider. The main administration centre is in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. The operations director is responsible for the management of the training provision and reports to the chief executive and executive board.

Qube provide apprenticeships to around 3,500 apprentices each year, across seven subject areas, the largest of which are health, public services and care, and business administration and law. Pre-employment training and traineeships are offered in conjunction with a network of partners and employers. Most learners are employed adults and most learning takes place in the workplace. A team of around 120 staff have direct contact with learners in the workplace.

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 planned for the anticipated COVID-19 restrictions early in the spring. They provided their staff with the necessary information, training and access to technology to help them teach online. Leaders and managers reviewed and revised the curriculum and the order in which they taught topics in preparation for the move to online learning. Leaders worked closely with staff to identify the impact of any of these changes on learners' progress and well-being.

Managers described the organisation as agile and were pleased at the speed that they had adapted the curriculum. They explained how the flexibility of staff and their willingness to learn new skills enabled them to teach online successfully and meet the needs of learners and employers.

Leaders and managers talked about how they worked closely with employers to recognise the impact of the pandemic on their businesses and on apprentices. Managers worked flexibly to ensure that apprentices whose daily work was disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions could continue to meet the requirements of their apprenticeships. Tutors adapted the curriculum to help apprentices continue with their learning. Tutors provided support for apprentices whose work patterns changed due to the pandemic.

Staff explained how they worked with employers to plan the curriculum for trainees. They added employers' training materials into the curriculum to help trainees learn about corporate behaviours, build their confidence and prepare them for an apprenticeship.

Staff explained how they benefitted from training and support. This enabled them to develop the skills and confidence to teach online and provide bespoke support to meet learners' needs. Staff told us they felt well-supported and valued and had benefitted from flexible working and social activities, such as quizzes and group chats. Apprentices and employers spoke positively about the support they received from staff at Qube that helped apprentices to continue their learning.

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 discussed the actions they and tutors had taken to ensure that apprentices could continue to make progress despite the challenges of the pandemic. Managers checked the progress of apprentices and trainees through performance reviews, sampling learners' work and observing lessons.

Managers explained how they used feedback from learners to improve teaching. They spoke to apprentices to review their learning and progress. This helped them understand the barriers apprentices faced at work. Managers used frequent surveys to collect feedback from trainees and their families.

Staff discussed the impact of COVID-19 on trainees. They explained how some placements had closed and trainees were not able to be furloughed. Staff explained the substantial negative impact of the pandemic on the mental health and well-being of trainees. Tutors developed strategies to motivate trainees and gave them information on topics such as the importance of maintaining a normal routine.

Tutors spoke about how they had changed the curriculum to support learners during the pandemic. For example, logistics apprentices completed an extra module on project management. Trainees recorded their progress using online notebooks, which improved their communication with tutors and made checks on learning easier.

Managers explained how most learners continued to attend online lessons and participated enthusiastically. They spoke about how tutors worked flexibly to support learners. For example, tutors adapted their work hours to meet learners' needs, meeting trainees in the evening to enable their parents to attend.

Managers explained how new learners now received advice and guidance very early in their courses to help them choose the right programme for them and their employer. They explained how apprentices and trainees who lost their jobs or placements received further help to enable them to find new jobs.

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

Leaders and managers explained how they prioritised the safety of staff and learners during the pandemic. They spoke about how they made sure that staff and learners knew how to keep themselves and others safe. In recognition of the wide age range of their staff and learners, they compiled a bank of age-appropriate resources about staying safe. For example, trainees use an interactive, scenario-based tool to learn about the potential risks of learning online and social media.

Leaders explained how they attend 'Prevent' duty meetings across the country to help them understand local and regional risks. They spoke about the resources they had developed to support tutors and to help learners understand local and national threats.

Learners we spoke with said that they felt safe and were confident that staff would deal promptly with any concerns they raised. They explained how tutors had contacted them frequently during the pandemic to check they were safe and well.

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