

Well Associates Limited

Progress monitoring report

Unique reference number:	1270876
Name of lead inspector:	Stuart Collett, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Well Associates Limited received a new provider monitoring visit in February 2019. At that time, inspectors made progress judgements under three themes.

This monitoring visit focused on the extent to which leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education and training in the current circumstances. It was undertaken as outlined in the [operational note on visits carried out from January 2021](#) and with reference to the further education and skills handbook.

These 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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 (coronavirus) lockdown restrictions, inspectors carried out this monitoring activity remotely. As a result, the range of evidence available to inspectors was narrower than would be the case during an on-site inspection. Therefore, this report provides a more limited level of assurance.

The impact of COVID-19 has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgement below. Inspectors did not evaluate leaders' response to COVID-19 during the spring and summer of 2020, when the provider was not open to all learners and there were no national expectations regarding remote education.

Theme

What progress are leaders and those responsible for governance making to ensure that staff teach a curriculum and provide support to meet learners' needs, including the provision of remote/online learning?

Insufficient progress

In the 12 months following the new provider monitoring visit and before the first period of national restrictions, leaders and managers did not act quickly enough to rectify the areas for improvement in their apprenticeship provision that had been identified. In planning for teaching of the level 5 apprenticeship for operations or departmental managers with their newest – and currently sole – employer, leaders and managers have not taken these areas into account. As a result, they have developed a programme which does not meet the needs of many apprentices.

The assessment of apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics has not improved. For example, all apprentices are following a level 5 apprenticeship which contains a qualification with a significant written assignment component. Apprentices' starting points in English and mathematics are not formally assessed until they have been in learning for four months, when formal teaching of functional skills qualifications begins. As a result, teachers and coaches cannot use this information to plan appropriately challenging targets and develop apprentices' skills from the start of the programme, or become aware of any potential challenges that apprentices may face.

Leaders have not ensured that a suitably robust assessment of apprentices' starting points takes place prior to the start of their programme. As a result, apprentices are often enrolled on to the level 5 programme who have no prior experience of learning at this level and may have benefited from completing qualifications or an apprenticeship at a lower level before progressing to level 5.

Leaders and managers do not ensure that all apprentices receive the necessary time off the job to complete their studies at work. As a result, too many apprentices struggle to manage their work-life balance and do not submit their work on time.

Teachers provide apprentices with helpful feedback to improve their work, including the quality of assignments. However, particularly for those apprentices where English is not their first language, teachers fail to provide sufficient feedback to help them develop their skills well enough.

Leaders have not developed suitable governance arrangements. Following the last visit, they appointed a chair of the board with significant skills and experience in many areas of their business and are currently in the final stages of appointing a non-executive finance specialist. However, they have not yet made an appointment with sufficient expertise in education to hold leaders to account.

Prior to the pandemic, leaders took sufficient steps in preparing to move their apprenticeship teaching from full-day, face-to-face sessions to shorter online meetings. They appointed a member of staff to become a champion of online learning. They selected an appropriate online platform for their needs and subsequently trained all staff on its use. As a result, the provider was able to continue to offer teaching to both new and existing apprentices.

Coaches ensure that most apprentices receive the appropriate support to complete assignments, giving guidance about structure, content and clear expectations in relation to style and format. However, most apprentices do not have experience of writing at level 5 and do not produce the assignments at the right level in the time allocated.

Teachers provide apprentices with appropriate remote learning activities and information so that they can apply theory to practice. Teachers share new information that relates well to apprentices' working environments and encourage them to discuss and debate theory and management tools in the context of real-life

examples. For example, apprentices discussed the changes required to move from offering a food take-out service back to an in-house seating service.

Apprentices receive clear guidance and help to access remote learning sessions. They learn quickly how to access information, listen to information and take advantage of break-out sessions to discuss topics.

Apprentices receive devices such as laptops to ensure that they can complete the expected assessments and assignments, if the devices supplied by their employer do not have the appropriate software, or they do not have devices of their own.

Coaches routinely discuss well-being at their monthly coaching sessions with apprentices and have enhanced these discussions as a result of the pandemic. They also introduce and discuss the monthly 'hot topic', which develops apprentices' understanding of topics such as well-being, safeguarding and keeping safe online.

Leaders have worked well with the employer to develop a bespoke advice and guidance programme for candidates interested in joining the apprenticeship programme. As a result, candidates understand the potential career opportunities the apprenticeship could offer, both within and outside of their current employment.

Leaders and those responsible for governance should take further action to:

- ensure that staff use a suitably thorough initial assessment of apprentices' starting points in all areas of their programme to inform the planning of apprentices' learning
- ensure that all apprentices receive their entitlement to time off the job to complete their studies
- implement a suitably experienced governance structure to ensure that leaders are held to account.

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