

Virtual Alliance Limited (VLUK)

Monitoring visit report

Unique reference number:	2495037
Name of lead inspector:	Peter Cox, Her Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	13 and 14 October 2021
Type of provider:	Independent Learning Provider
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Ofsted undertakes to carry out monitoring visits to all newly directly funded providers of education programmes for young people within the further education and skills sector. This monitoring visit was undertaken as part of those arrangements and as outlined in the 'Further education and skills inspection handbook', especially the sections entitled 'Monitoring visits' and 'Monitoring visits to providers that are newly directly publicly funded'. The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below.

Established in 2008, as a private training provider and subcontractor, Virtual Alliance Limited now provides study programmes to 16 to 19-year-old learners within the sports and performing arts sectors. At the time of the monitoring visit, there were 735 learners at the provider. Of these, 646 learners were studying the level 3 extended diploma in sports coaching and development, 73 were studying the level 3 extended diploma in performing arts, and 16 were studying the level 2 extended certificate in sport. As part of their courses, there were 131 learners studying towards GCSE English and/or mathematics qualifications. Learners are taught at sports clubs and performing arts campuses nationally.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in designing and delivering relevant education programmes that have a clearly defined purpose? Significant progress

Leaders, managers and staff are passionate about supporting learners to make excellent progress and achieve well, which the vast majority do. They have meticulously designed the curriculum so that learners swiftly develop the skills, knowledge and professional behaviours they need for higher education and employment.

Leaders and managers work diligently to align the curriculum to meet the specific needs of partner clubs and organisations. For example, at some campuses where fitness is a priority, level 3 sport staff now prioritise the teaching of tactical skills and nutrition. Leaders and managers work successfully with higher education institutions to ensure that programmes give learners the knowledge and skills necessary for university.

All staff are highly ambitious for their learners to become better athletes or performers, which the vast majority do. Staff support learners to complete additional qualifications, such as Football Association coaching and refereeing qualifications. Level 3 performing arts staff support learners to audition for films and theatre productions, to further learners' experiences.

Leaders and managers use rigorous quality assurance systems to improve the quality of education successfully. For example, they have recently introduced a new system of lesson observation and support which is quickly enhancing the quality of teaching. The experienced and well-informed governing body works closely with leaders and staff. They support and challenge leaders effectively to improve the quality of education. Governors check that leaders are meeting all their statutory requirements for safeguarding and equality and diversity.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. They provide high-quality, individualised professional development for staff on topics such as successful questioning so that staff become better teachers. Leaders and managers support new staff, who require additional support, to improve their teaching rapidly.

Leaders and managers check carefully that learners are on correct courses. They have suitable arrangements in place to identify and support learners with additional needs. The highly trained special educational needs coordinator provides useful training so that staff support these learners skilfully to make as good progress as their peers.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality education programmes for young people that prepare them well for their intended job role, career aim and/or personal goals? Significant progress

Training staff plan and design the curriculum logically so that learners develop the knowledge and skills they need. For example, level 3 sports learners initially study anatomy, which helps them when creating training plans. Staff accurately identify learners' starting points and use this information to plan teaching carefully. For example, level 3 performing arts learners with an ambition in musical theatre have extra dance and jazz lessons.

Appropriately qualified and experienced staff provide high-quality teaching. For example, level 3 performing arts learners benefit from expert dance teaching and so rapidly become better performers. Level 3 sports training staff use their expertise to teach learners about nutrition and understand its impact on fitness and training. Staff help learners to develop professional behaviours such as confidence, self-reflection and teamwork swiftly. For example, level 3 performing arts learners critique each other's work respectfully and professionally. Staff provide useful feedback that helps learners to understand their progress so that they know how to improve. As a result, all learners, including those with additional learning needs, make very good and often excellent progress. They become better athletes and performers.

Leaders and managers provide significant opportunities for learners to understand their next steps. They help learners apply for further study, which the vast majority do successfully. Learners benefit from meaningful and useful work experience. For example, level 3 sport learners with an interest in journalism complete work experience in social media for their local football clubs. Consequently, staff ensure that learners are prepared for their next steps well.

Learners who need English and mathematics as part of the courses develop these essential skills well. Staff carefully support them to improve using helpful examples in their subjects. For example, level 3 performing arts learners are taught how to budget theatre productions. Level 3 sports learners learn to calculate body mass index and use safe ratios for exercise within their coaching sessions. Staff do not ensure that learners who do not require these qualifications make as rapid progress.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in ensuring that effective safeguarding arrangements are in place? Significant progress

The highly experienced and qualified designated safeguarding leads have developed a robust culture of safeguarding. They work well with external agencies, such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the police force, and have a secure understanding of regional and local concerns. They use this information to help keep learners safe. For example, members of the police force spoke with learners about the dangers of knife crime in Surrey.

Leaders and managers check thoroughly that staff are safe to work with learners. They ensure that all staff complete level 2 training in safeguarding. As a result of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, some staff completed training in bereavement to support learners.

The safeguarding team has introduced highly effective systems to identify, track and monitor learners who are or may be at risk. As such, they rapidly intervene and support vulnerable learners effectively.

Learners feel safe and know how to make disclosures. Staff teach students to keep safe, including online. They teach highly relevant topics to help keep learners safe, such as gambling awareness, consent and eating disorders.

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