

Inspection of Capella Associates Ltd

Inspection dates: 8 to 11 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Capella Associates Limited (Capella) is an independent training provider based in Worcestershire. The provider formed in 2005 and has offered levy-funded apprenticeships in quality and continuous improvement since March 2018. Apprentices study in a range of businesses in public, private and voluntary sectors across England. At the time of the inspection, there were exactly 320 apprentices. Of these, 18 are on the level 3 improvement technician, 193 are on the level 4 improvement practitioner, 39 are on the level 4 quality practitioner, 52 are on the level 5 improvement specialist and 18 are on the level 6 improvement leader apprenticeship standards.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours quickly. They learn to use new tools and techniques that make significant improvements within their employers' business. Apprentices gain self-confidence and feel empowered to solve problems. They can work in new ways to identify unique and novel solutions to problems in their workplace.

Apprentices become more resilient throughout their studies. For example, apprentices speak confidently in team meetings and feel able to challenge previous quality improvement approaches. They receive critical feedback from colleagues and trainers and act upon it quickly.

Apprentices demonstrate consistently positive attitudes and commitment to their apprenticeship programme. They talk passionately about the new knowledge they acquire and how they use this knowledge to take forward projects across the organisations in which they work. As a result, apprentices are excited about their futures and proud of the positive impact that they have on their organisations.

Apprentices have a well-established awareness of fundamental British values. They link these values directly with their employers' code of conduct and consequently treat colleagues with dignity and respect. Apprentices encourage open and trusting relationships and foster inclusive working environments. For example, apprentices on the level 6 improvement leader apprenticeship consider confidently the issue of modern slavery within automotive supply chains.

Apprentices feel safe and are valued in their organisations. They have a sound knowledge of personal safeguarding and understand the support structures that exist to help them with issues such as mental health. Apprentices have access to external counselling services, which provide opportunities for them to understand and use the concept of mindfulness. Consequently, apprentices feel better able to manage their own well-being and that of their colleagues.

Attendance is high for most apprentices. Where absence occurs, trainers take sensible actions to ensure apprentices stay on track with their studies. For example, apprentices have access to recorded sessions and additional one-to-one sessions if required.

Too few apprentices receive high-quality, unbiased careers advice and guidance. Consequently, apprentices are not always sufficiently aware of the wider career opportunities available to them outside of their employers' business.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed a curriculum for apprentices that is highly ambitious. Leaders are passionate about continuous improvement and ensure apprentices share this ambition and commitment successfully. Apprentices are inspired to improve rapidly. For example, apprentices on the level 3 improvement technician apprenticeship undertake self-initiated improvement projects very early in their apprenticeship.

Leaders work effectively with employers to plan and develop the curriculum. They work with employers to understand their needs and respond positively in nearly all cases. Leaders, in discussion with partners, refresh the curriculum so that it includes the relevant content required to meet specific business needs.

Leaders and managers support their staff, who speak positively about their supportive work environments, effectively. Leaders engage in frequent conversations with staff to ensure that well-being and workload are managed effectively. For example, following a staff survey, an imbalance in workload was identified, and leaders consequently recruited additional support staff to help reduce staff pressures.

Leaders ensure that staff have appropriate professional development through their review processes. Leaders meet with staff frequently to establish areas for additional development. As a result, trainers undertake additional training on understanding dyslexia and helping apprentices who experience anxiety. Consequently, apprentices are better supported with these issues.

Leaders ensure trainers appropriately plan and sequence teaching in a logical way. The complexity of tasks that apprentices undertake increase over time. For example, apprentices studying on the level 4 improvement practitioner apprenticeship learn to identify problems with processes, completing a root cause analysis before moving on to the control phase of the process.

Leaders ensure trainers adjust sequencing within the curriculum to build in additional revision sessions for apprentices where needed. As a result, those apprentices who are behind in their studies are supported well to achieve.

Trainers are highly experienced practitioners in their relevant sectors. They use this experience to share real-life examples with apprentices, who use this to deepen their understanding of sector behaviours. For example, on the level 5 improvement specialist apprenticeship, trainers give useful examples of using lean six sigma in the workplace to improve processes. Apprentices retain this information and use it to plan appropriate projects. This results in apprentices making an effective contribution at work.

Trainers build a range of assessment methods into the curriculum. They use questioning, quizzes and more formal practice assessments to check what

apprentices know and remember over time, using this information to set challenging targets. Trainers tackle misconceptions during one-to-one coaching sessions with apprentices effectively. Consequently, apprentices' understanding deepens as they progress through their apprenticeship.

Trainers support apprentices to develop their mathematical skills successfully. Apprentices learn advanced statistical methods, which underpin the knowledge that they require in the workplace effectively. For example, apprentices on level 6 improvement leader apply complex methods to scrutinise workplace surveys for statistical bias correctly.

Trainers do not always take clear actions to support apprentices with their written English skills. As a result, apprentices do not always develop these skills to a standard appropriate to the level of their apprenticeship. Apprentices do not systematically develop the skills that are expected at a higher level of study. For example, they are unable to reference correctly and deploy advanced research skills and techniques.

In a few cases, trainers do not always ensure apprentices receive clear and concise feedback that supports their sustained improvement over time. The written feedback that apprentices receive in too many cases is overly positive and does not identify the clear actions that need to be taken to improve their work. As a result, apprentices are not always aware how to improve their work and develop their skills.

Trainers review apprentices' progress frequently. However, not all employers participate fully in tripartite reviews. Consequently, apprentices' on- and off-the-job training is not coordinated as well as it could be. As a result, a few apprentices are not able to apply theory into practice, within their workplaces, as quickly as they could.

Apprentices produce high-quality work that aligns well with the level of study. In many instances, the standards of work exceed that of the level of study. Apprentices bring this high quality of work into their places of work, and employers value this greatly.

Apprentices achieve well. A significant number of apprentices attain high grades in their end-point assessments. However, in a small number of cases, staff have not ensured apprentices complete their studies within a swift time frame. Leaders have recently taken action to support those who are behind in their studies. As a result, the number of apprentices falling behind has reduced substantially.

Leaders and managers have put in place suitable arrangements for the scrutiny of the quality of education that they provide. The advisory board is made up of experienced practitioners who have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. They provide healthy challenge and hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and managers place a strong focus on the safeguarding of apprentices. They have developed a culture of safeguarding across the organisation that apprentices can identify clearly. Leaders work effectively with employers to assess work-based risks that apprentices may face. Consequently, apprentices are aware of these risks and adopt safe working practices at work.

Leaders have suitable safeguarding policies and procedures in place, including those for the safe recruitment of staff. Processes are reviewed frequently and adjusted as needed. For example, leaders now scrutinise new applicants' prior social media activity to ensure they are suitable to work with their apprentices.

Leaders have appointed a suitably qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSL. The DSLs ensure that trainers undertake regular training to develop their knowledge of areas such as safeguarding against the risks of radicalisation and extremism and online safety. This knowledge is used to enrich the apprentices' learning effectively. However, leaders do not ensure that trainers help support apprentices to recognise local safeguarding issues. Consequently, too few apprentices understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremist behaviours where they live and work.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that all employers are involved in the planning of apprentices' learning so that on- and off-the-job learning activities are coordinated effectively.
- Trainers should ensure that all apprentices receive appropriate careers advice and guidance so that they are able to consider the wider career opportunities available to them.
- Trainers should ensure that apprentices' understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in their locality is developed throughout their programmes.
- Leaders should ensure that trainers target gaps in apprentices written English skills effectively and develop these skills rapidly and substantially over time.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2510854
Address	5 Nobury Hill Inkberrow Worcester WR7 4HA
Contact number	01386 793981
Website	https://capellaassociates.com/
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Kate Smith
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Qualitrain Limited

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Mark Parton, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bennett	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Kelly Perkin	His Majesty's Inspector
Zoe Ibbotson	Ofsted Inspector
Andy King	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Morgan	His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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