

Inspection of Virgin Active Limited

Inspection dates:

18 to 20 January 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Virgin Active (VA) is based in London and provides health and fitness activities for paying members. Most of its clubs are in London and Essex, with a small number in Sheffield, Solihull, Manchester, Nottingham and Northampton. VA is an employer provider, providing apprenticeships for staff based in its clubs.

At the time of the inspection, there were 54 apprentices, including six who were on a break in learning. There were 14 apprentices on the level 2 leisure team member apprenticeship and 40 on the level 3 team leader or supervisor apprenticeship. Nearly all apprentices were over 19 years of age. There were no apprentices in receipt of high needs funding.

VA does not work with any subcontractors.

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

Apprentices at VA are enthusiastic and positive about their learning. They are respectful to each other and their tutors. They rightly appreciate the inclusive and supportive environment that leaders and tutors create. During their induction, apprentices learn about Virgin's values, which include promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. Apprentices see colleagues modelling these values in their work and quickly adopt them. Apprentices justly take pride in the knowledge and skills they acquire. For instance, apprentices on the level 2 leisure team member apprenticeship gain useful qualifications in areas such as lifeguarding and swim coaching, which are national skills shortage areas. As a result, apprentices grow in confidence and acquire the skills that enable them to become valued team members.

Apprentices rightly appreciate the modern, industry-standard cardiovascular and weight training facilities and swimming pool at the VA Academy. These enable apprentices to learn and master the techniques they then successfully apply at work. They also gain significant benefit from the high-quality electronic resources that they use to consolidate and embed their learning well. As a result, apprentices acquire current industry skills and knowledge that enable them to fulfil their roles effectively and take on additional responsibility.

Tutors encourage apprentices to be inquisitive and proactively search for new information to help them improve their work and business operations. Tutors facilitate discussion in workshop activities, where apprentices share their workplace experiences and consequently appreciate the application of theoretical learning in workplace settings. For example, apprentices on the level 3 team leader or supervisor programme discuss the importance of cleanliness and the impact this has on all aspects of club activities.

Leaders provide apprentices with a wide range of activities that extend their learning beyond the technical content of their programme. Apprentices regularly receive relevant and informative bulletins on topics such as money management, sexual harassment and women in football. Tutors revisit these topics in workshops to consolidate apprentices' understanding. Apprentices also have access to a wide range of relevant and engaging activities to develop their personal interests. For instance, apprentices participate in community events such as Pride and travel on cruise ships. Apprentices have access to free, high-quality resources to support their physical health and mental well-being. They therefore develop into well-rounded individuals who make a positive contribution to the clubs in which they work and to wider society.

Staff quickly develop open, positive and appropriate relations with apprentices. Consequently, apprentices feel able to talk to staff about concerns they may have or areas where they need help. As a result, apprentices justifiably feel safe and are supported well.

Too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship within the planned time. Too often, leaders and managers prioritise other business operations above apprentices' learning. Therefore, apprentices make slower progress than they could.

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

Leaders and those with responsibility for oversight have been too slow to take action to ensure that apprentices make the progress expected and complete their apprenticeship well. Consequently, too many apprentices do not complete their apprenticeship within the planned timescale. Leaders have now recognised this and put in place appropriate actions to ensure that greater priority is placed on supporting apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the clubs in which they work. As a result, those apprentices who were behind are catching up, and many are now nearing completion of their apprenticeship.

Leaders and members of the VA apprenticeship governing board, which provides oversight, do not have a sufficiently sharp focus on the key weaknesses within the provision. While leaders and members of the board understand the issues impacting on apprentices' experience, they do not sufficiently recognise the adverse impact these have on apprentices' progress. As a result, the actions they take are often not sufficiently timely or targeted on the key areas for improvement.

Leaders do not monitor apprentices' participation in all aspects of the extensive programme of personal development activities provided by VA. Consequently, leaders are not able to fully evaluate how many apprentices access these opportunities and how effectively they are meeting apprentices' needs.

Leaders have implemented an ambitious curriculum that is closely aligned to business needs. For example, leaders amended the content of the team leader or supervisor programme to place greater emphasis on developing apprentices' ability to have difficult conversations at work and adapt their leadership style to suit different situations. As a result, apprentices acquire the skills and knowledge that meet the needs of the business.

Leaders and tutors pay close attention to the order of the curriculum. They ensure that apprentices initially acquire the skills necessary for them to make a positive contribution at work. Apprentices then build on these foundations, acquiring increasingly complex skills and knowledge. For example, leisure team member apprentices initially learn about health and safety before developing their skills in lifeguarding and swim coaching. As a result, apprentices' understanding builds over time, enabling them to remember key information and fulfil a wider range of activities at work.

Tutors use their wealth of industry experience well to make workshop sessions interesting and engaging. They regularly meet with apprentices and their line manager for useful discussions about the progress the apprentice is making and any

support that may be needed. Tutors skilfully contextualise high-quality resources to help apprentices understand how theoretical concepts are applied in the workplace. For example, when teaching budgeting, tutors challenge team leader or supervisor apprentices to consider how they would accommodate unanticipated expenditure requirements. Consequently, apprentices become more agile in their thinking and apply their learning in their workplace successfully. The small number of apprentices with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well and make the progress expected.

Most tutors provide apprentices with timely, carefully considered feedback that helps apprentices improve their future work. However, tutors on the level 2 leisure team member apprenticeship do not ensure that apprentices receive this feedback quickly enough, which slows their progress.

Apprentices have access to support and advice that informs their future career and study choices well. Tutors and colleagues readily share their learning and career experiences with apprentices. General managers helpfully support apprentices to understand the career pathways available to them. Staff organise useful talks from guest speakers in roles apprentices aspire to reach in the future. These talks develop apprentices' understanding of job roles and career pathways. Apprentices are also encouraged to use the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity to access information about careers outside of VA. Consequently, apprentices are prepared well for their next steps in work or learning.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders at VA place a high priority on safeguarding. All staff, including apprentices, regularly complete appropriate training that maintains their understanding effectively. Tutors teach apprentices about safeguarding, including the indicators of possible harm. As a result, apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding. They know how to identify concerns and how to raise them.

Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are conducted prior to staff starting work with apprentices.

Leaders take appropriate steps to protect apprentices from the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Tutors talk to apprentices about the potential risks, contextualising them into the fitness industry successfully. Consequently, apprentices know how to take sensible steps to keep themselves and their peers safe.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and members of the apprenticeship board should continue to take action so that apprentices complete their programme well and within the planned timescale.
- Leaders should ensure that the wider curriculum meets apprentices' needs and that all have opportunities to benefit from it.
- Leaders should ensure that learners receive timely feedback to enable them to improve the standard of their future work.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2510862
Address	Virgin Active 26 Little Trinity Lane Mansion House London EC4V 2AR
Contact number	020 812 4404
Website	virginactive.co.uk
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Jenny Ellis
Provider type	Employer Provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality compliance and apprenticeship manager, 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 apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

Roland White, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Martin Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
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