

Gordon Franks Training Limited

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Stuart Collett HMI

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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. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

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.

Information about the provider

Gordon Franks Training, now known as GFT, is an independent learning provider based in the West Midlands offering apprenticeships and education programmes for young people, and traineeships. It was purchased by PQMS Ltd in February 2018, which itself was then acquired by the Hexatronic Group. At the time of the visit, there were 215 learners in learning. Education programmes for young people accounted for 14 learners, 21 learners were undertaking traineeships, and 180 learners were following apprenticeship programmes. The provider offers a mix of apprenticeship frameworks and standards, with the large majority of apprentices following a level 2 or level 3 framework in early years. The remaining apprentices study mainly customer service and business administration standards. A high proportion of learners have been excluded from school or college.

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 took steps to ensure that all learners were regularly contacted at the start of the pandemic. They issued detailed guidance to staff on the support learners should receive, and prioritised those following study programmes, where they anticipated that regular engagement would be a challenge.

During the period when providers were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions, almost half of learners following study programmes were not engaging in their learning. As a result, leaders arranged for staff to create paper-based resources for learners, as well as setting individual tasks for learners by email. Tutors reported regularly on learners' engagement, which informed strategies for intervention with learners who were not participating in their learning.

Staff and learners received training in the use of digital tools for learning before the period of COVID-19 restrictions. Leaders invested in additional online resources for childcare apprentices and learners on study programmes.

Leaders used the flexibilities offered by some end-point assessment organisations to ensure that most apprentices due to complete their apprenticeship during the period of COVID-19 restrictions could do so. Some assessment has not taken place due to the need for face-to-face assessment, which cannot currently take place. Leaders are working with employers, learners and awarding bodies to ensure that the affected group of learners can complete their apprenticeship as soon as safely possible.

Leaders took the decision to resume face-to-face teaching on study programmes as soon as it was safe to do so. They found that engagement had improved as the period of remote learning continued. However, levels of engagement had remained significantly lower than prior to COVID-19 restrictions.

Stakeholder employers stated that leaders were quick to act to ensure that apprentices were able to continue learning online during the pandemic. They also told inspectors that the provider increased the level of pastoral support learners received.

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?

Managers have worked with tutors of both study programmes and apprenticeships to ensure that learners have continued to be able to access their learning. They have been able to monitor learners' progress through existing quality systems and have worked with tutors to amend the curriculum to suit the needs of learners. For example, apprentices have continued to have regular meetings with tutors through online conferencing platforms, and have been able to complete and submit written assignments during COVID-19 restrictions.

Managers identified strategies to help learners to catch up where they were falling behind with their learning. Tutors provided additional work and revised action plans, and gave additional flexible support. Managers reported that most learners were now back on track.

Leaders and managers have identified that a lack of work experience opportunities for learners following study programmes presents a significant barrier to learning in the current climate. They are investigating the possibility of hosting virtual opportunities at their premises to ensure that learners can develop the skills they will need in the workplace.

Tutors have provided extra support for learners while working remotely, particularly for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. This support has included regular contact for all learners, tailored to the method of communication

that learners prefer. For example, some learners are uncomfortable with video conferencing online, but respond well to communication through text messages or phone calls.

Tutors have identified that some apprentices produced more or higher quality work at home during COVID-19 restrictions. They said that learners attribute this to having more focused time to work, without the pressures of balancing their work role with their apprenticeship.

Managers have ensured that all learners have access to careers advice. A particular focus has been given to apprentices who have been made redundant as a result of the pandemic and learners following study programmes who reached the end of their programme during COVID-19 restrictions.

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

The designated safeguarding lead reported that they had undertaken additional safeguarding training. Senior leaders explained how they had been supported by their professional networks to address the challenges of the pandemic and had adapted their safeguarding policy and practice.

Leaders have provided training for staff on how to keep learners safe and how to record safeguarding issues and actions on the newly purchased database. They reported how they had worked closely with social workers to keep learners, particularly those in care or who are care leavers, safe and engaged.

Leaders told inspectors how they have worked hard to contact the most vulnerable learners and their parents. Managers and teachers explained how they have used repeated phone calls and emails to reassure themselves of the safety and well-being of these learners. Managers reported that they conducted a welfare survey in June. Managers and teachers reported how mental health first-aiders supported learners, particularly those with anxiety and feelings of isolation.

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