

NDA Foundation Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	1247998
Name of lead inspector:	Emma Woods, Her Majesty's Inspector
Visit date(s):	30 September to 1 October 2020
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Rufford Hall Waterside Way Trent Park Nottingham NG2 4DP

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

NDA Foundation Limited (NDA) is an independent learning provider based in Nottingham. NDA provides level 3 diploma courses in curtain making and soft furnishings, interior design and garden design. These courses are funded through advanced learner loans. Almost all students complete their courses online, with a very small minority on courses which combine online and face-to-face lessons. At the time of the visit, NDA had 195 active students.

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?

NDA is an established provider of online learning courses. Leaders and managers believe they have maintained the curriculum and student experience without any detriment from COVID-19. They highlighted an increase in student numbers and attributed this to the rise in demand for online study.

Almost all students have continued to study online through the Virtual Learning Studio (VLS). A few students who attended classes on site transferred to online courses or paused their studies. Leaders and senior tutors made provision for students to catch up on these sessions once they could attend the campus.

Senior tutors explained how tutors continued to operate effectively from home during lockdown. Leaders ensured that tutors had access to appropriate equipment and resources while unable to attend the office. Tutors told inspectors that they felt well supported to work from home.

Leaders described how lockdown prompted them to reflect further on how to meet the needs of students studying online. They listened to student feedback regarding the curriculum and identified areas for development. One outcome has been a new

combination course with online learning and virtual classes. The creative team has developed videos and interactive quizzes for the online curriculum to make it more interesting and attractive to students.

Students continue to have their individual needs assessed. Leaders and senior tutors have maintained additional support for students using established assistive technologies. For example, adaptations to an online open event for prospective students made it accessible to hearing impaired attendees.

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?

Leaders explained that tutors at NDA are experienced online teachers. During lockdown, leaders focused on supporting tutors to use a wider range of popular conferencing platforms. Tutors have been trained in several videoconferencing packages to deliver group classes. They report that the training was helpful and that they feel confident to use the software. Senior tutors highlighted that there was a need to continue to support tutors to develop their practice when using this software for online classes.

Leaders, senior tutors and tutors shared their experience of the isolation that working from home can bring. This personal perspective prompted them to consider additional support mechanisms for students. For example, the team now offers extra tutorial sessions through videoconferencing. Senior tutors report that the monitoring of student progress continues to be effective. They outlined a process of frequent online meetings with leaders and how tutors' monitor their students to ensure participation.

Leaders and tutors gave examples of a range of flexibilities for students impacted by COVID-19. For example, students with childcare commitments during the day were offered additional evening sessions with tutors. Furlough allowed some students to submit work more quickly. This was assessed promptly by tutors who, according to the senior tutors, have improved and become more efficient in their assessment techniques. Tutors work more collaboratively with colleagues, sharing and developing work together, so they do not become overwhelmed.

Tutors describe how each course has a calendar that includes current industry and professional practice, trade fairs, major exhibitions and competitions. To maintain the range of activities while exhibitions are on hold, this now includes online seminars with employers. For example, students have attended sessions on colour offered by Dulux and Pantone to broaden their career development.

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

Leaders have continued to maintain their established approaches to safeguarding. They highlighted induction activities which cover practical safety, for example how to

use equipment like craft knives and adhesives, alongside safeguarding sessions that include how to stay safe online. Staff described a range of information that was available on the VLS and student support services.

Tutors state that their safeguarding training is up to date and that safeguarding is a consistent feature at the ongoing fortnightly quality meetings with leaders. Leaders, senior tutors and tutors know what to do if a safeguarding incident were to occur.

Students told inspectors that contact with tutors had increased as a result of lockdown and that this supports their well-being. All students spoken with were able to articulate what to do if they had a safeguarding concern. Those returning to on-site lessons felt safe and prepared by their tutors to do so.

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Store Street
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