

Inspection of Virtual Alliance Limited

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 May 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Education programmes for young people	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Virtual Alliance Limited (VLUK) is a national independent training provider based in Oxford. VLUK provides education programmes for young people, specialising in the sports and performing arts sectors. Learners are taught at 29 sports clubs and performing arts venues across the country. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,064 learners studying vocational courses. Of these, 941 were studying level 3 sports coaching and development and 96 were studying level 3 performing arts. Twenty-seven learners were on level 2 sports programmes. As part of their course, 282 learners were studying GCSE mathematics and 188 were studying GCSE English qualifications. Almost all learners were aged 16 to 18 years old.

VLUK does not have any learners in receipt of high needs funding. The provider does not work with any subcontractors.

In a new provider monitoring visit in October 2021, inspectors judged VLUK to have achieved 'significant progress' in all three areas.

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

Learners enjoy their studies at VLUK and feel valued. They are motivated to succeed, because of the supportive and aspirational learning environment that leaders and staff have created. Learners rightly value the high-quality teaching they receive from experienced tutors who link theory and practical learning skilfully. As a result, most learners achieve distinctions in their vocational qualifications.

Learners benefit from useful opportunities to apply and consolidate their learning in real-world settings. In level 3 sports coaching, learners routinely use the coaching techniques that staff teach them to support children in local schools to improve their sporting skills. Level 3 performing arts learners rehearse with industry professionals to develop their confidence and competence to perform in commercial theatre productions successfully. Consequently, learners quickly acquire the knowledge, skills and professional behaviours required for the sectors in which they aspire to work.

Learners have a secure understanding of relevant topics, such as healthy relationships, mental health awareness and the importance of nutrition and exercise for good physical health. Many apply the principles of equality and inclusion in their studies effectively. For instance, in level 3 sports coaching, learners understand how to adapt their communication and coaching style to provide stimulating activities for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As such, learners quickly develop the positive attributes they need to work successfully with others, including those who are vulnerable.

Most learners have high attendance to their vocational lessons and they are punctual. However, too many learners who study mathematics and English GCSE qualifications in online sessions do not demonstrate the same high level of commitment to these subjects. As a result, they miss valuable learning and do not achieve the grades of which they are capable.

Most learners participate in constructive activities beyond their studies that develop their character and interests well. For example, level 2 and 3 sports learners at Farnborough have raised funds towards a 3-G football pitch to support local people. In Lydney, learners organise useful sports and arts activities for socially disadvantaged children as volunteers on summer camps. Level 3 performing arts learners design performances for older people in local care homes to promote valuable inter-generational contact and support. As a result, they learn how to be positive citizens and make a valuable contribution to their local communities.

Learners feel safe at VLUK. They know how to report concerns if needed and are confident that staff will take swift action. Staff make sure that learners understand about risks that may affect them in their lives, such as those of gambling, criminal exploitation and knife crime. Consequently, learners know how to take sensible steps to protect themselves and their peers. However, too many learners do not remember what they have been taught about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

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

Leaders work closely with employers and stakeholders to plan ambitious courses that support the demand for roles in the sports and performance industries well. They design programmes to make sure that learners master new techniques and skills in these sectors effectively. For example, level 3 performing arts learners gain valuable skills in contemporary West End dance. In level 3 sports coaching, learners become proficient in coaching an extended range of football defence strategies. As a result, learners develop the skills that employers in these sectors need.

Leaders and staff have high expectations for all learners, including those with SEND. They take learners' needs and interests into account when planning the programmes they offer. For example, leaders teach a level 2 sport curriculum that enables learners to consolidate their fundamental skills and knowledge before moving to higher level study, which almost all do.

Leaders and tutors plan the order in which subjects are taught effectively, so that learners develop knowledge and skills in a logical order. In level 3 sports coaching, tutors firstly teach learners how to complete detailed risk assessments, so that they can train others safely. In level 3 performing arts, learners acquire fundamental skills in basic dance steps before they progress to advanced movements such as double and triple pirouettes. As a result, learners successfully build their knowledge and skills over time and make positive progress.

Highly experienced and qualified tutors use their expertise to plan interesting and engaging activities to build on what learners already know and can do. Tutors explain concepts clearly, breaking down complex ideas into easy to understand components. For example, mathematics GCSE tutors use virtual whiteboards to explain to learners how to simplify formulae. In level 2 sport, tutors explain carefully how chemicals damage DNA and make cells more prone to cancer. Consequently, learners understand and apply complex knowledge effectively.

Tutors and teaching assistants provide effective and appropriate support for learners with SEND. They make sure that these learners benefit from specialist resources, additional teaching sessions and extra time in assessments. Tutors check what learners know and can do thoroughly and frequently. As a result, learners with SEND achieve as well as their peers or better.

Leaders and staff check learners' progress carefully. They identify those who are at risk of falling behind and intervene quickly to make sure that tutors provide these learners with additional help and guidance. Tutors communicate with parents effectively, so that together they can support learners to remain on their programme and progress well. As a result, most learners achieve their qualifications successfully.

Tutors use a range of assessment activities skilfully to help learners understand what they do well and what they need to do to improve further. They prepare learners well for external assessments. For example, teachers of English GCSE provide useful

practice papers to help learners analyse text and identify language features under examination conditions confidently. In level 2 sport, tutors challenge and support learners to retake their external assessments to achieve higher grades, which many do.

Staff benefit from high-quality and relevant professional development, which makes them effective in their teaching and support roles. Leaders provide valuable mentoring to new tutors to support their teaching practice. Leaders place a high priority on staff well-being. They celebrate staff's contribution through a termly awards scheme. Consequently, staff feel valued and well supported at work.

Leaders and tutors provide most learners with relevant and useful careers advice and guidance. Learners benefit from a wide range of informative guest speakers from industry. This helps them understand pathways available to them at the end of their courses. As a result, most learners are prepared well for their next steps and have a clear plan for their routes into higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

Leaders understand the strengths and weaknesses of their provision very well. They have implemented a series of sensible actions to increase the proportion of learners who achieve a grade 4 and above in mathematics and English GCSE qualifications. For example, they have recruited specialist staff in these areas and monitor learners' attendance closely. However, it is too early to evaluate fully the impact of these actions.

Governors work closely with leaders to provide effective oversight. They share leaders' vision and strategic ambitions for VLUK. Governors have an accurate understanding of the areas that leaders are working to improve and monitor the progress of their actions. They use their considerable skills and experience to support and challenge leaders to secure further improvements, such as increasing the number of females and those from minority ethnic groups who study on football and boxing academy courses. As a result, governors support continuous improvement at VLUK very well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Increase the number of learners who achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE mathematics and English qualifications.
- Make sure that learners who study GCSE mathematics and English qualifications have high attendance to lessons and are punctual.
- Make sure that learners remember what they have been taught about the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism and how these may affect themselves and others.

Provider details

Unique reference number	2495037
Address	25 Bankside, Stationfields Kidlington Oxfordshire OX5 1JE
Contact number	01753 362248
Website	www.vluk.org
Principal, CEO or equivalent	Rob Johnson
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	N/A

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the chief operating officer, 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

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