

Phoenix Training Services (Birmingham) Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	1248007
Name of lead inspector:	Ian Higgins HMI
Visit date(s):	7– 8 October 2020
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Phoenix Wharf Bolton Street Birmingham West Midlands B9 4HH

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

Phoenix Training Service (Midlands) Limited is part of a much larger group company structure called Challenge-trg. In August 2019, the provider was awarded 'work-ready Lot 2' devolved funding by the West Midlands combined authority (WMCA). More recently, Phoenix have focused on upskilling learners, some of whom were furloughed due to COVID-19 (coronavirus). There is now a greater focus on offering qualifications at level 2 and 3.

Phoenix delivers learning programmes to employed workers and those seeking work within Birmingham. Exactly 59 learners were in learning at the time of the visit. Some 61% of learners are studying at level 3. The remaining learners are studying at level 2, with a few learners studying entry level and level 1 qualifications. Most learners are working towards qualifications within the construction, health and beauty sectors. All learners are over the age of 19.

The provider does not use subcontractors.

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?

Senior leaders shared how they worked with the WMCA, stakeholders and employers to review the curriculum offer. There has been a change to focus on upskilling those in employment, including those who have been furloughed. For example, Phoenix have worked with local construction employers and stakeholders. They have developed courses that focus on the knowledge employees need in this sector, such as electrical safety awareness. Leaders state learners were better prepared for

returning to on-site work after a period of being furloughed. In partnership with the National Careers Service, those learners who did not return to their job roles were provided with careers advice and guidance.

Senior leaders have moved teaching and assessment to an online learning platform. They shared that plans were already in place, but that the spread of COVID-19 accelerated this move. They told us that there has been significant investment in infrastructure and staffing. For example, laptops and table-top devices were purchased and placed at employer sites. Leaders say that this ensured that learners could access the online learning platform. They are continuing to upskill learners so that they have the digital skills to use the online platform. Where learners cannot access online learning, Phoenix staff are supplying paper-based materials.

Leaders have put in place training to support staff in using the online learning platform. There has been a range of professional development courses that staff have completed. Staff continue to receive ongoing support from members of staff with the appropriate digital skills.

Leaders told inspectors that they had furloughed a number of staff. Almost all staff have now returned. They talked about the financial support they have received from Challenge-trg. Learner numbers have increased because of flexibilities allowed by the WMCA in where they provide learning and to whom.

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 and staff told us that by moving to an online learning platform the disruption to learners' studies was minimal. Staff shared how they communicated regularly and frequently with learners through a range of methods. They used virtual classrooms to support the teaching of the curriculum. They communicated individually with learners to focus on specific learning goals.

Leaders and staff indicate that teachers have benefitted from a range of professional development courses. For example, staff told us how they are now able to create video recordings of manicure and pedicure treatments to support learners on courses in healthcare and beauty therapy. This facility has allowed learners to develop their practical skills. Staff have worked with awarding bodies to adapt assessments so that learners were still able to complete them.

Leaders have worked with teachers to ensure that all learners' progress is tracked through the online learning platform. Staff shared how they can set, mark and feed back to learners on assessments. This information is used in regular meetings. Leaders indicated that this allows them to prioritise the support for learners, so that all learners continue to make progress. Staff explained how the online learning platform can be changed to support learners with specific needs. For example, they

can change the screen display, font size and background to support learners with dyslexia.

Leaders and staff stated that they were able to adapt quickly to online learning. They described the benefits of learning in this way. For example, learners enjoy the flexibility of being able to learn around their employment and childcare commitments. Staff told us that learners have continued to develop their knowledge and skills. For example, learners on a basic skills course have improved their report-writing skills. This helps them when communicating with clients in their job roles.

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

Leaders provided updated safeguarding training for staff and the designated safeguarding team. Leaders feel that this made staff more aware of the risks associated with the pandemic, allowing them to be more vigilant.

Leaders and managers created a range of resources about staying safe when working from home and online. Staff informed us that they provided bespoke information to learners linked to the specific sectors in which they are employed.

Leaders told inspectors that through a new online learning platform they were able to prioritise those learners who may have been vulnerable at the time of the emergence of COVID-19 restrictions. They have provided support to learners through 'routine care calls'. They have worked with external agencies where needed.

Leaders stated that they remained in regular contact with learners. Learners share this view and told us how they would raise any concerns they might have about their safety. Learners said that they feel safe.

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