

PeoplePlus Group Limited

Interim visit report

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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

PeoplePlus Group Limited is a national independent learning provider, owned by Staffline Group Plc. The provider delivers adult education and apprenticeship programmes, including to apprenticeship-levy employers. It supports around 8,000 learners across a range of locations nationally. Subcontracted partners work with just under two thirds of these learners. Of the 3,000 apprentices, around three quarters are on standards-based programmes and the remainder follow frameworks. Approximately half of apprentices are on programmes at level 2, and a third at level 3. The largest vocational areas are in retail, management and team leading, with around half of apprentices.

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 reported that prior to the national lockdown they wanted to change the way in which they delivered training. The closure of learning centres during this time accelerated these changes. The move to remote learning has provided leaders with the opportunity to deliver training nationally to groups of learners and apprentices.

Leaders identified the need to develop staff's information technology skills to support the move to remote teaching and learning. They provided staff with the training they needed. Leaders worked with teams to identify staff with the expertise needed to develop the remote learning curriculum. Staff from the apprenticeship team collaborated with those working in the adult skills team. Staff told inspectors how much they valued this collaboration and are planning to continue with this approach.

Leaders discussed how they were working with their partners to provide training during the pandemic. They developed training for adults made redundant during this time. Staff have changed their teaching to reflect the changes in learners' starting

points. For example, they have provided careers education, information, advice and guidance for learners who had been working in highly skilled roles within the travel industry. These learners have accessed training to re-enter the job market in roles such as working with large employers in food and distribution.

Leaders are working to address barriers to learners accessing training following the reopening of learning centres. They have developed community pop-up sessions for pre-employment training in response to learners' concerns over the use of public transport.

During the visit, leaders talked to inspectors about the challenges to the curriculum during the pandemic and in the future. They identified the impact on employers in sectors such as hospitality, leisure and tourism. The changes in the job market have led to a review of the training offer. This will lead to a focus on broadening the adult skills curriculum and traineeship programmes in the future.

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 stated that, following the return to on-site teaching, they have continued to adapt the curriculum. Staff use both face-to-face and remote learning according to the needs of learners and apprentices. Leaders have identified that a small number of learners face difficulties in accessing training through technology. For example, staff identified learners in warehousing whose first language was not English, and who did not have the digital skills needed to access their online English sessions. Staff went into their workplace to provide – and train them to use – the technology they needed to start their programme.

Leaders reported how they used weekly meetings to maintain an overview of learners' progress. They were able to identify emerging barriers, including learners' attendance and engagement with training. Staff were able to provide the support that learners needed to continue with their studies.

Leaders stated that most apprentices continue to access training remotely. Leaders have invested in a range of remote learning systems to support training. During the visit, inspectors talked to tutors and coaches. They said, 'We are able to identify learners' skills gaps, plan interesting activities, and set improvement targets to support apprentices to improve.'

Leaders and staff continue to review the quality of training delivered. Through their planning for remote training, tutors and coaches have developed a range of approaches. They use small group and pair work to provide learners with the knowledge they require on specific topics. Staff drop into breakout sessions to provide individual support where needed. They encourage learners to use the 'chat' facility to ask questions. Tutors and coaches use this facility to check learners' understanding of topics and plan training.

Leaders have identified the challenges to delivering external assessments for some subjects. For example, the ongoing restrictions to employer sites provide difficulties where apprentices need to take their functional skills examinations to complete their programme.

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

Leaders have prioritised well-being and support for staff and learners during the pandemic. They identified an increase in mental health and well-being concerns and provided staff with the training they needed. A large number of staff became trained mental health first aiders. This training enabled them to identify learners who were at risk and provide the support they needed during this time.

Leaders stated how they have introduced a revised careers education, information, advice and guidance model. This allows them to identify the personal, emotional and well-being needs of learners. During the visit, inspectors talked to a small number of learners. They said, 'The support we received helped in addressing our work-life balance, and planning workload while working from home to avoid additional stress.'

Leaders identified the training learners needed to ensure they were safe when working remotely. Learners complete safeguarding training which includes e-safety, and guidance on how to keep safe in their daily lives.

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