

Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Ruth Stammers, 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

Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited (SBSA) is based in Liverpool and delivers the majority of its programmes in the north west of England. It is the largest Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) and Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) training provider in the north west. There are currently around 250 apprentices who are studying a range of apprenticeships from level 2 to level 5, specialising in housing, leadership and management, and business administration. It also delivers training for 150 adults, with most studying health and social care courses.

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 have implemented bespoke models of teaching for apprentices and adult learners. Following a period of entirely remote teaching, due to COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, leaders are now assessing the needs of employers and learners to ensure that there is a mix of face-to-face and remote training that best suits their needs. For example, health and social care programmes are remotely delivered due to the risk of cross-contamination between learners who work in care homes. The induction element of the provider's employability programme is taught in the classroom in order to give learners the digital skills they require to later learn online.

Leaders have adapted the curriculum to meet the changing priorities of employers. For example, in health and social care, they prioritised training on infection control for those learners who had not already completed this. They ensured that all learners were competent in the safe handling of medication. This is to meet the need for additional trained staff within care homes in the event of staff absence through illness or self-isolation.

Leaders moved to remote teaching through necessity, but they now recognise the benefits and will retain online delivery for aspects of the curriculum in the future. They feel that staff are now more accessible to apprentices and employers. Apprentices' progress reviews are more regularly attended by line managers, making them more meaningful. Learners have found pre-recorded lessons useful, as they fit in around their home and work commitments. Employers have praised the speed and efficiency at which leaders have implemented online learning.

Leaders feel that their biggest challenge is gaining guidance and clarity from awarding bodies regarding requirements for final assessments. A few awarding bodies are yet to confirm what the final assessment will now entail as they are unable to complete these in classroom settings. This is causing delays to apprentices' completion.

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?

Trainers have recognised the impact that COVID-19 restrictions have had on apprentices and learners and are now providing more pastoral support. They have regular one-to-one sessions and check on learners' and apprentices' mental health and well-being at every contact. Trainers have altered the format of progress reviews for apprentices to include questions on well-being at the beginning of the review. They say that this is increasing the positive relationship between trainers and apprentices.

Trainers are continually developing the curriculum content and the order in which it is delivered. Lessons have been shortened to make learning more manageable in an online environment. Innovative aspects, such as podcasts, online interactive whiteboards and discussion forums, have been included to make learning interesting and engaging. Tutors have noticed a subsequent improvement in the quality of learners' and apprentices' work

Leaders and trainers feel that they have taken the necessary steps to ensure that learners and apprentices are able to use technology and can access online learning with confidence. They have loaned laptops to learners who did not have access to technology at home. Trainers have delivered copies of work packs to care homes for health and social care learners who are unable to access the internet. They say that most learners and apprentices have caught up and are making positive progress.

Leaders have made adaptations to their previous quality assurance systems to address the changes implemented due to the pandemic. They have invested in extensive staff training on the delivery of safe and effective online teaching and training. Leaders now review lessons virtually. This enables them to quality assure teaching, learning and assessment and ensures that learners and apprentices continue to develop their knowledge and skills. Trainers are now able to provide

immediate feedback to learners and apprentices by using screen sharing to explain where they can improve the quality of their work.

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

Leaders have adapted the information they give to apprentices and learners based on the risks they face due to the pandemic. All learners have received training on safely attending online video lessons. For example, they are aware that they should dress appropriately and use a neutral background that will not identify where they live.

Leaders explained the local risks, which have become more prevalent in recent months. For example, money lending and online gambling have been identified as a high priority. Teachers have been trained on how to inform apprentices and adults of these risks and how to access appropriate support.

Trainers use various methods to raise awareness of mental health, stress and anxiety. They regularly contact learners and apprentices to enquire about their well-being and provide guidance on coping strategies. For those apprentices who manage others in their own workplace, they have included guidance on how to support staff who are experiencing anxiety.

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