

# Interlearn Limited

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	58814
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Stuart Collett HMI
<b>Visit dates:</b>	28–29 October 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	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 students and apprentices in this period, including learners with high needs and those with special educational needs and 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

Interlearn Limited is an independent learning provider based in the West Midlands. It provides the majority of its apprenticeship programmes in the Midlands, London and the South East. Two subcontractors deliver approximately one third of the provider's apprenticeships. At the time of the visit, the company had 417 apprentices in learning. The majority are working towards a range of standards-based apprenticeships in business management, transportation, and health and social care. The provider has also recently started offering a safety, health and environment technician level 3 apprenticeship. All other apprentices are on frameworks in health and social care, and early years – mostly at level 3. There were 51 learners following courses funded by the adult education budget and European Social Fund, which offer employability programmes and pathways to employment in health and social care and construction.

### **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 took the decision to move their provision to an online delivery model during the early stages of the pandemic, with the intent of allowing delivery staff to be confident to work remotely before restrictions were imposed. As a result, staff say that they were able to focus on adapting the curriculum to meet the changing needs of learners and employers.

Leaders stated that the impact of COVID-19 on the provider has been linked to the effect of furlough and redundancy in sectors in which the provider offers apprenticeship programmes, such as rail, manufacturing and aviation.

Leaders were concerned that the existing apprenticeship delivery model of face-to-face masterclasses might not work for all learners when this needed to move to an online approach. As a result, the provider invested time and resource in changing the existing delivery models to teach the curriculum during the pandemic. The provider purchased additional resources to support learners, including video conferencing software, online courses which build knowledge towards their apprenticeship or adult learning programme, and a suite of well-being resources.

Leaders and managers feel that some interim assessment methods offered in place of face-to-face assessment do not suit the needs of all learners, particularly those where their courses have a significant practical assessment element. Managers plan to return to the original methods of assessment as soon as it is safely possible to do so, to avoid this group of learners being disadvantaged.

Subcontractors state that they have received an increased level of support from the provider during the pandemic, including more regular meetings, support for curriculum development, and regular sharing of information on the changes taking place within the sector.

Employers feel that the provider has taken reasonable steps to be able to continue working with learners and has increased the amount of support available to learners throughout the pandemic, including the move to online learning and conducting safe visits to the site where necessary.

**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, managers and teachers discussed how they have modified their existing quality assurance processes to enable continual monitoring of learners' progress and the quality of the curriculum. Some observations of teaching and learning now take place online.

Middle leaders described how they had changed the content and ordering of the curriculum in the light of the impact of the restrictions. For example, team leader apprentices were set projects that reflected the business challenges linked to COVID-19. In rail driving apprenticeships, the delay in practical rail driving opportunities meant that it was possible to bring forward some the teaching of functional skills.

Leaders discussed how the pandemic has had a negative effect on many of the sectors the provider works in, such as rail, manufacturing and aviation. They took steps to ensure that learners who were most at risk remained engaged. This included loaning technology to learners who needed equipment and setting up remote classrooms with laptops on employer sites, where visits were not possible.

Teachers discussed how careers advice and guidance for all learners were adapted to reflect the pandemic in terms of potential opportunities and progression routes for learners.

Leaders and teachers report that the pandemic has resulted in extra time being available to develop both new and existing curriculum delivery plans. They have also developed a suite of new resources to support employers in their understanding of the learner journey and the commitment involved from all parties in an apprenticeship.

Staff received training in the use of newly adopted digital tools for learning, including an apprenticeship learning management system and online meeting software. Using a peer support model, staff continue to take part in weekly sessions to develop their skills in using this technology for teaching. They have also received additional online safeguarding training.

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

Managers described their efforts to communicate with all apprentices throughout the restrictions, using emails, phone calls, surveys and online monitoring software.

Leaders explained how they provided support, in the form of information on mental health and links to resources, for vulnerable learners. Apprentices in many sectors were adversely affected through furlough and redundancy; for example, some train drivers felt a heightened level of isolation.

Managers described how they had prepared safe classroom spaces for the return of face-to-face learning for learners. Apprentices reported that when they returned to the classroom, they were supported in keeping safe, including temperature checks and social distancing.

Both teachers and learners stated that they had received regular newsletters on how to stay safe and maintain mental well-being during the restrictions.

Apprentices feel that they have been well trained on how to keep safe online and in the classroom and know where to go if they need support or to report a concern.

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