

London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy 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

The London Hairdressing Apprenticeship Academy Limited (LHAA) is an independent learning provider based in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire. It provides apprenticeships and adult learning courses in hairdressing, barbering and beauty therapy. LHAA has six academy centres located in Borehamwood, Camden, Chiswick, Croydon and Loughton. In March 2020, LHAA was acquired by a large national provider.

At the time of the visit, LHAA had 740 learners enrolled. Of these, 367 are studying a level 2 hairdressing apprenticeship standard-based programme and 34 are studying a level 3 advanced framework-based apprenticeship in hairdressing. The rest are adult learners, 136 of whom are studying a beauty therapy programme. In September this year, LHAA introduced a level 1 study programme. LHAA has no learners with high needs.

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 prepared thoroughly for the period when providers were only open to some learners due to COVID-19 restrictions. They spent time reflecting on the implications for staff, learners, employers and industry. They were conscious of restrictions on close contact work and practical skills training. They produced a COVID-19 action plan and had daily meetings of the leadership team.

Leaders are confident that they were quick to adapt to online learning and in removing potential barriers to staff and learners. They have reviewed and developed their curriculum because of COVID-19 restrictions. They have responded to new course demand by introducing study programmes that lead to an apprenticeship.

They now offer flexible timetables for adult learners, such as evening and weekend classes.

Leaders have used frequent communication to resolve any challenges presented. They feel that they have successfully managed the expectations of stakeholders. They are now fully prepared for any future restrictions.

Employers say that the development of learners' practical skills has been the greatest challenge. They feel that remote online learning has worked well for theoretical topics. They have worked with LHAA staff to prioritise learners coming to their final qualification assessment. They have put in place additional training to build learners' practical skills and confidence. Staff have provided information packs for employers to plan in-salon training. Leaders have worked with awarding organisations to agree workable adaptations for those learners coming to the end of their course and who are unable to carry out practical skills assessments at work. Employers feel that leaders have done everything they could have, given the restrictions of the pandemic.

Leaders talk about the benefits resulting from the experience of COVID-19 restrictions. They intend to continue with a curriculum that is a blend of remote and face-to-face learning. They will continue to use technology and social media to check learning on a daily basis. They will maintain the enhanced communication and information sharing with stakeholders.

Leaders provided employers with guidance on financial support available during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. They believe that some employers have been able to sustain their business because of this. They described the benefits of apprentices being able to continue with their learning despite being furloughed. Many have now returned to learning at work.

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?

Before the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, managers ensured that learners had access to laptops and the internet. They provided learners with financial and technical support to do this. They arranged for hairdressing practice heads to be delivered to learners for practical skills development at home.

Leaders worked with industry suppliers to source free products and online tutorials. This supported learning and provided learners with additional opportunities to practise and consolidate their skills.

Tutors say that learners have adapted positively to online learning. Employers agree that learners have secured their theoretical understanding. Tutors make use of social media to check learning and learners' active participation, and to answer questions on a daily basis. Learners say tutors have been always available for them.

Learners talk about posting their work on social media platforms and they feel confident to do this. They see this as a significant aspect of promoting themselves within the hair and beauty industry.

Tutors report that some learners are reluctant to learn online. They have coached them on an individual basis to acquire digital skills and self-confidence. They say that these learners are now able to use the camera in group sessions and upload assessments and videos of their work.

Managers state that non-attendance protocols have stayed the same for remote learning and report high levels of attendance. Those who did not attend received daily well-being calls from tutors.

Tutors provide plenty of opportunity for learners to interact in the lesson with their tutors and peers. Tutors planned many options to assess learning and skills development. For example, learners film and post their practice, which is critiqued by peers and tutors. Learners say that this feedback helps them to develop their technique.

Tutors carefully adapt online learning for those learners who need extra help with their learning, for example in showing learners how to use speech-to-text options or changing the background and text on screens. Tutors say that they spend time showing learners how to use technology to access learning materials.

On returning to the training academy, staff told us that they undertook a detailed analysis of each learner's skills and knowledge. They provided learners with individual action plans to enable them to complete their final assessments. They say that many learners have completed their qualification as a result.

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

Learners know how to keep themselves safe. Leaders produced specific online training for staying safe online during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. They amended the safeguarding policy and produced a COVID-19 health and safety information pack.

Leaders acknowledged the return to academy training as a potential risk. They conducted a learner survey and used the findings to plan. They introduced phased start times to maintain social distancing and avoid peak-time travel on public transport. They sent learners videos showing the new safety procedures for each of the academies.

Tutors carry out well-being checks with learners at the start of each remote learning lesson. They reinforce the importance of following government COVID-19 guidance to stay safe.

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