

Total People Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number: 55022

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Visit date(s): 11–12 November 2020

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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

Information about the provider

Total People Limited (TPL) was acquired by the Learning, Training and Employment Group in July 2015. TPL is a national learning and skills provider. The company's head office is based in Openshaw, Manchester; it has training centres in Crewe, Wigan, Macclesfield, Manchester, Chester and Warrington.

At the time of the visit, TPL had 2,252 apprentices in learning, with the majority of apprentices studying professional services, dental nursing, healthcare and pharmacy, and automotive programmes. There were also just over 200 adult learners studying employability programmes and 56 learners aged 16 to 19 on study programmes and traineeships.

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 from face-to-face to solely online learning in early March 2020. They ensured that staff had access to equipment and appropriate training to deliver their programmes.

A few young learners and apprentices experienced barriers to learning throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. These barriers included increased caring responsibilities for siblings, limited access to a computer, as their parents were working from home, and changes to work hours and additional responsibilities. In these circumstances,

staff delivered online lessons and reviews on an individual basis at a convenient time for the learners and apprentices.

Leaders accessed the government's provider relief fund to help cover the cost of learning coaches engaging with apprentices who had been furloughed or were on a break in learning. Learning coaches carried out welfare checks, delivered sessions on resilience and provided job coaching and careers advice for apprentices who were looking for alternative employment. Apprentices say that this continuation of learning gave them a focus during an uncertain time.

Upon COVID-19 restrictions being eased, leaders worked with employers to carry out training and assessments which could only be completed face to face. For example, learning coaches in dental nursing received training on the stringent health and safety measures required to enter a dental surgery.

A number of challenges are delaying a few apprentices from completing their qualifications, such as the requirement to invigilate functional skills examinations face to face. Additionally, some businesses were forced to close, for example in hospitality and retail.

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?

Learning coaches have altered the order that they deliver the curriculum due to COVID-19 restrictions. For example, in electrical installation, learning coaches delivered the theory behind the installation of fire alarm cables online, before practical face-to-face sessions could resume. When apprentices returned to practical activities in the workshops, learning coaches felt they had a firmer understanding of the installations unit and could complete practical assessments to a higher standard.

Leaders described how a few apprentices were given extra responsibilities during the pandemic. For example, pharmacy apprentices began to deliver medication on hospital wards earlier than they would under normal circumstances. Learning coaches utilised this opportunity to gain evidence for apprentices to use in their final assessments.

Learning coaches provided guidance and support for apprentices where their job role or working environment had changed. For example, learning coaches in childcare altered the curriculum so that apprentices understood their role as key workers. For a few younger apprentices working from home was unfamiliar and they found it challenging to structure their day. Learning coaches liaised with employers to support apprentices in planning their workload and avoiding distractions.

Leaders say they will continue with a mixed model of face-to-face and online delivery in the future. They say that online learning has provided flexibility and allows those who are shielding or self-isolating to continue with their studies. As a result of less

travelling time, learning coaches have been able to increase their contact time with apprentices. Apprentices speak highly of the support they receive from learning coaches. They say that the increased support has motivated them to make progress on their apprenticeship.

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

Leaders have placed an increased focus on mental health and well-being for staff, apprentices and learners during the pandemic. They provided training in strategies to balance work and home commitments, particularly for staff and adult learners who were home-schooling their own children.

Regular news stories on obesity and unhealthy eating habits, prompted leaders to raise awareness of this with their apprentices and learners. They have placed a greater emphasis on how healthy eating can improve your physical and mental well-being. Topics covered include how to eat healthier on a budget, the nutritional benefits of fruit and vegetables and the avoidance of convenience meals.

Learning coaches prioritised discussions on online safety with apprentices. They discussed the increase in internet scams such as adverts for high interest loans to ensure apprentices did not fall into the trap of increased debt.

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