

Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Employer

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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/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

Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) provides healthcare services for people with a range of physical and healthcare needs. They provide services at around 150 sites across north and central London and surrounding areas. Since September 2017, the organisation has been delivering levy-funded apprenticeships to its own employees. At the time of the interim visit, 16 apprentices are on a level 3 team leading apprenticeship and 12 apprentices are on a level 3 business administration apprenticeship.

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?

At the start of the pandemic, leaders swiftly stopped face-to-face teaching. Following a short break in learning, they moved to an online training model. They continue to deliver all training online in preparation for a second wave of COVID-19. Leaders provided support to apprentices so that they could learn online. For example, they introduced a scheme to loan laptops to apprentices who required them.

Leaders prioritised the well-being of apprentices during the pandemic. All apprentices received risk assessments to assess their individual needs and were provided with support to continue with their programmes.

Leaders are aware of the increased workload pressures that many apprentices, particularly those who work directly with patients, experience during the pandemic. Many apprentices' job roles changed due to the pandemic and apprentices were given the opportunity to postpone their apprenticeship. All apprentices elected to continue with their studies.

Leaders provide additional time for apprentices to complete their qualifications. They have sought, in collaboration with awarding bodies, alternative methods of assessment. For example, they use discussions with apprentices about their practice, where they are unable to assess their competencies through observations on hospital wards.

Leaders provided training for staff to manage remote working. For example, staff were taught how to use online conferencing facilities to communicate with each other and to provide training for apprentices. Leaders work closely with external groups such as Health Education England, to provide a broad range of resources about COVID-19 to employees, including apprentices. Leaders keep apprentices up to date with frequent emails, well-being seminars and a COVID-19 section on the intranet.

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 and assessors acknowledge that the pandemic has given them time to reflect on their programmes and consider the sequence in which they teach topics. They focus on more topics at the beginning of the apprenticeship that build apprentices' basic knowledge and skills. For example, in team leading, trainers teach apprentices about the operational elements of leadership before moving on to the strategic aspects.

Trainers feel confident using the online tools to teach their lessons. Leaders provided support at the start of the pandemic, when there was a pause in learning, to help trainers to use the online platform and plan their teaching. Trainers have now developed more interactive resources for apprentices. Apprentices speak positively about the materials available to them and the support they receive. Trainers provide apprentices with additional resources if they find topics challenging. Apprentices can study additional topics, such as minute taking and influencing skills.

Leaders use standardisation meetings to check the quality of teaching and monitor apprentices' progress. Trainers recognised that they had to adapt their teaching style to online teaching. They report that some activities, such as group work and discussions, are challenging to do online. As a result, they have put in place more quizzes, and one-to-one discussions, to assess apprentices' gaps in knowledge. If apprentices fall behind, trainers arrange additional sessions or provide recorded lessons so that they can catch up.

Apprentices are very positive about their learning experience. Many report that they prefer learning online because they do not have to travel, and it is easier for them to attend.

Managers identify that the apprenticeships form part of a career pathway for employees. They provide apprentices with information about careers, available in the

trust and the wider health service, as a part of their course. Around a third of apprentices have been promoted.

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

The safety of apprentices has remained a priority for leaders during the pandemic. Many apprentices work in roles where they have contact with patients and, as a consequence, keeping safe during the pandemic has been of utmost importance.

Leaders have provided apprentices with safeguarding training and regular updates during the pandemic. Apprentices are aware of the safety guidance associated with their working practices.

Staff recognise the impact of the pandemic on apprentices' well-being. Trainers have increased contact with apprentices so that well-being concerns are dealt with swiftly. Apprentices feel safe within their working environment and appreciate the support that they receive from their trainers.

With the increased requirement to work and study online, apprentices benefit from training on how to keep themselves safe while working remotely. They are aware of the importance of keeping passwords safe and working securely. Apprentices know how to report any concerns that they might have.

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