

# Maritime and Engineering College North West

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 54873

**Name of lead inspector:** Maura Cummins, Her Majesty's Inspector

**Visit date(s):** 11 to 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

The Maritime and Engineering College North West (MECNW), formerly The Laird Foundation, is a charity limited by guarantee, and based on the banks of the River Mersey in Birkenhead. MECNW contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency to provide study programmes, traineeships and apprenticeships. The provider specialises in engineering, construction and marine engineering training. It works with over 85 companies through its own arrangements and those of the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB). The college provides traineeships, apprenticeship standards and frameworks. A small proportion of MECNW's training is fully funded by learners and employers. At the time of the visit there were 75 learners aged 16 to 18, six adult learners and 255 apprentices enrolled on programmes.

### **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 adapted the curriculum to ensure that learners and apprentices can continue to make progress on their courses throughout COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions. They have created online modules that ensure apprentices can learn theoretical concepts while away from college. Leaders rescheduled practical training to take place when learners and apprentices returned to college in September.

Leaders feel that they work closely with a range of organisations to ensure that staff have up-to-date technical knowledge. Staff use this professional development to support

learners and apprentices to develop the knowledge and skills that employers require. For example, leaders have worked closely with a national network of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) industrial providers. As a result, staff receive up-to-date technical knowledge and knowledge about how the industry is responding to COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders and managers prioritised the return to learning and training for the most vulnerable learners and apprentices throughout COVID-19 restrictions. Timetables were extended by a further two months to allow extra time for learners and apprentices to catch up on the practical sessions and support those who needed assistance due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders adapted the curriculum to meet the knowledge and skill needs of new learners and apprentices. Staff have put in place arrangements to support learners and apprentices to develop the skills they need to make a successful start to their programme. For example, in the traineeship programme, they prioritised the teaching of work-related skills to rectify the poor time management that learners had developed during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Staff have increased their communication with learners, apprentices and employers. They kept in regular contact via email, telephone calls and one-to-one remote sessions. Employers report that the provider adapted quickly from face-to-face sessions to online learning. They say that they were regularly updated on their apprentices' progress. Apprentices feel fully supported by all staff.

**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 say that they have worked closely with staff to monitor learners' and apprentices' progress since the start of the pandemic. They use a 'virtual drop-in' observation process to check on the quality of teaching and training. Leaders feel that by grouping trade-specific staff together, teams now work more collaboratively, developing innovative and creative ways to engage with their learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers provide staff development to help teachers and trainers understand how to deliver appropriate online learning and training. They ensure the training is tailored to meet the needs of employers. Teachers and trainers say that they now feel more confident in delivering sessions online and use a wider range of resources to make learning and training interesting and enjoyable.

Following COVID-19 restrictions, teachers and trainers feel they have adopted a more innovative approach to teaching and training. They now record 'live' sessions and stream them online to enable learners and apprentices to access learning around their changing shift patterns. Teachers and trainers have adapted the curriculum to

include additional teaching sessions for learners and apprentices to catch up with sessions that they may have missed due to the COVID-19 restrictions.

Leaders, managers, teachers and trainers believe the change to online learning is a positive development. They feel that it has enabled learners and apprentices to continue to learn throughout the local and national restrictions. They provided laptops and posted workbooks to those learners and apprentices who had limited access to technology. Leaders intend to continue delivering aspects of their curriculum online in areas such as health and safety.

Since the start of the pandemic, leaders have completed careers' information, advice and guidance online. Teachers and trainers use learners' and apprentices' experience and reflections of the workplace to inform their next steps.

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

Leaders identified a range of additional safeguarding risks arising from the pandemic. They implemented staff training in addition to clear guidelines on how staff, learners and apprentices can keep themselves safe, including when online. Safeguarding managers have used their links with local authorities and other agencies to monitor the safety and welfare of their most vulnerable learners and apprentices.

Leaders and managers identified learners and apprentices who needed support with health and well-being. For example, furloughed apprentices who were suffering with anxiety were supported by staff. Staff encouraged learners and apprentices to keep in regular contact and complete a mood journal to identify what triggered their anxiety, while also signposting them to mental health and well-being resources.

Staff, learners and apprentices say they feel safe, supported and well looked after both in the workplace and in college. Learners and apprentices say they missed the social interaction of being in college.

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