

University of Central Lancashire

Interim visit report

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Type of provider: Higher education institution

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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 University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) is one of the largest providers of higher education in the north west region and the United Kingdom. The main campus is in the city of Preston in Lancashire and provides a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as higher and degree-level apprenticeships. The university has approximately 32,000 students and employs 1,600 academic staff.

In September 2017, UCLan began delivering levy-funded apprenticeship standards. It provides training for 3 apprenticeship training programmes. These include the level 5 healthcare assistant practitioner, level 5 nursing associate practitioner and, more recently, the level 4 children, young people and families practitioner. UCLan currently has 322 apprentices, with just over three quarters enrolled on the nursing associate practitioner programme.

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 formed an emergency management group to instigate the changes needed as a result of the pandemic. While they have continued to deliver broadly the same curriculum, leaders and managers immediately involved employers and apprentices in establishing new ways of working.

Leaders felt well prepared for the move to online and remote learning. They say this is because they have a well-established information and communication technology infrastructure for their existing mixture of face-to-face and online learning. Leaders provided the appropriate training and support for staff to achieve this. They encourage tutors to teach interesting and innovative lessons online. Leaders are proud of the resilience and flexibility that staff demonstrated to meet the ever-changing demands of employers and apprentices working in the nursing and healthcare sectors.

Leaders and managers have worked with awarding organisations, employers and apprentices to adapt assessment processes so that apprentices continue to make progress. Tutors have re-ordered aspects of the curriculum and delayed the teaching of practical laboratory workshops until they can be done safely. Employers feel that UCLan have been flexible and accommodating throughout the pandemic.

Leaders, managers and tutors have embraced the positive aspects that a mixture of face-to-face and online learning brings to teaching apprenticeships. They recognise that this has increased efficiency. Tutors are now able to spend more time supporting apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills.

Leaders and managers recognise the difficulties COVID-19 restrictions have brought. They acknowledge the challenges they face in gaining safe, secure work placement opportunities for apprentices in nursing and healthcare. Leaders and managers say that the pandemic has brought rich opportunities for apprentices to develop their team working, resilience and communication skills. However, they are acutely aware of an increase in apprentices' mental health and anxiety issues. Apprenticeship tutors provide consistent support for apprentices' welfare, well-being, resilience and positive mental health.

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 and managers have ensured that tutors received the necessary training and support to help them develop their online teaching skills. This helped tutors improve their confidence to use innovative online teaching strategies such as managing group role play activities through online breakout rooms.

Managers and tutors have developed an inclusive and flexible curriculum despite the COVID-19 restrictions. During the pandemic, nursing associates were unable to complete practical assessments at work. Leaders arranged for them to attend the clinical skills laboratory at the university to practise venapuncture on prosthetic limbs and mannequins.

In the event of further local restrictions, tutors have adapted the curriculum. Apprentices can now provide videos for assessment instead of observations. They

can demonstrate their clinical skills through a simulated online clinic or laboratory environment.

Throughout the pandemic, leaders and managers carried out virtual learning walks to assure the quality of teaching and learning. They supported staff to teach an online curriculum that meets the needs of apprentices, including those with special educational needs and/or high needs. The curriculum includes career development opportunities through pathways within the National Health Service Trusts.

During the COVID-19 restrictions, managers and tutors kept in regular contact with apprentices. This enabled them to monitor apprentices' welfare and progress. Tutors quickly identified those apprentices who could not access online learning at home. They provided laptops, mobile devices and Wi-Fi access so that apprentices could study remotely.

Tutors are not afraid to take risks in their endeavours to deliver high-quality, innovative teaching and are very proud of what they have achieved. This is because they know that their managers want them to succeed.

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

Leaders and managers carry out regular welfare checks on staff and apprentices. They use a web-based application for staff and apprentices that alerts the security team and/or relevant emergency services if the user has a concern about their safety or welfare.

Leaders provide regular safeguarding and welfare training for staff. Tutors ensure that apprentices know how to keep themselves safe at work and when learning online. Apprentices complete mandatory COVID-19 related 'UCLan-safe citizen' training before coming onto campus.

Leaders have weekly meetings with practice partners and employers to identify and inform support for their more vulnerable apprentices. They recognise apprentices' increased vulnerabilities around isolation, welfare, well-being, anxiety and loneliness.

Apprentices we spoke to appreciate the support and encouragement they have received from tutors and staff in very challenging circumstances. Since returning to campus, apprentices feel safe.

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