

Training Plus (Merseyside) Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	50244
Name of lead inspector:	Kim Bleasdale, Her Majesty's Inspector
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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 those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

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

Training Plus Merseyside Limited (TPM) is an independent learning provider based in Liverpool. The company was formed in 2001. TPM contracts with the Education and Skills Funding Agency for apprenticeships and traineeships. They currently provide training to 169 apprentices and 31 learners on the traineeship programme. TPM offers apprenticeships in childcare, customer services, team leading and business administration at levels 2 and 3.

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 and managers say they were well prepared and able to react swiftly when COVID-19 restrictions were put in place. They prioritised the preparation of computers, configured their IT systems and identified which apprentices could not access online learning at home. Leaders made arrangements to help apprentices obtain laptops through a local charity. This meant that when the need arose, they were able to move all teaching online with minimal disruption.

Leaders and managers supported and encouraged staff to deliver an online curriculum that meets the needs of learners, including those with special educational needs. They have continued to assure the quality of the curriculum but were unable to observe tutors teaching live classes because of the limitations of their chosen video conferencing software. Instead, they viewed pre-recorded theoretical sessions, videos, podcasts and apprentices' work. Leaders have recently invested in better technology which enables them to carry out quality assurance checks for live online teaching.

Managers and tutors made it their priority to keep in close contact with apprentices. This enabled them to monitor apprentices' progress. There were a few apprentices who could not access online learning at home. Alternative arrangements to support them included the delivery of paper resources so that they could continue to make progress towards their qualifications.

Senior leaders worked with a wide range of employers, partners and charities. Employers were very complimentary about the support they received from TPM staff during the pandemic.

Managers were particularly vigilant regarding their staffs' health and well-being. They had regular telephone calls and online meetings to help staff maintain a healthy work-life balance. Managers are very proud of the way staff have supported each other through the period of restrictions.

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?

Tutors had already used online learning technology but had not taught classes online prior to the pandemic. Leaders provided tutors with a variety of training to help them develop their online teaching skills, for example using breakout rooms. They encouraged tutors to be creative and innovative. Tutors feel that they have been well supported by their managers. They now confidently use online tools for producing videos and podcasts.

Leaders supported staff to adapt the curriculum to ensure that apprentices could continue to develop their practical skills. Hairdressing tutors uploaded video demonstrations of cutting hair from their homes for apprentices to study. Apprentices copied and practised their skills using the training heads that leaders had provided. Tutors have added a number of new modules to the early years apprenticeship curriculum. These include how apprentices can support children's additional needs and disabilities in an early years setting.

Apprentices enjoy their online learning and appreciate being able to learn flexibly. They can access videos and other resources, to suit their work shifts and family commitments.

A small number of apprentices are nearing their final assessments. Staff are working closely with the relevant assessment organisations, to ensure that apprentices can achieve in the event of further restrictions.

A few apprentices were made redundant during the pandemic. Staff immediately rallied to reassure them and to focus on giving the appropriate careers advice and guidance. As a result, almost all found employment and were able to continue with their apprenticeships.

Tutors at TPM are very aware of the anxieties that apprentices have with regard to keeping themselves safe from COVID-19. They provide practical advice and support to help apprentices cope when travelling to and from work on public transport.

Tutors have a very positive attitude towards using new digital technology. They have overcome their initial fears and now embrace the new approach to online teaching.

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

Leaders made regular contact with apprentices, including those who they considered to be vulnerable, to check their safety and well-being and to see how well they were progressing. They uploaded 'mind and body workouts' such as fitness videos and videos on coping strategies for panic attacks.

Since returning to on-site lessons, leaders have taken practical steps to make staff and apprentices safe. They created 'bubbles', reduced class sizes and amended their delivery model to fortnightly attendance with extended class times. Apprentices say that they feel safe because of these changes.

Both staff and apprentices received training on how to use digital resources safely. Staff learned how to safely use video-based tools for online teaching. Apprentices learned about the importance of dressing appropriately and having safe online privacy settings. During the pandemic, apprentices received additional training on mental-health awareness and infection control and prevention.

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