

Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited

Interim visit report

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Name of lead inspector: Ian Higgins, 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 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.

Information about the provider

Project Management (Staffordshire) Limited (PM Training) is part of the Aspire Housing. PM Training has two offices in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, where almost all learners are based.

Exactly 981 learners currently study with PM Training and its subcontractors. Of these, 408 learners are on study programmes. A further 14 learners are on traineeship programmes in business administration, and construction. There are 559 apprentices – with 205 studying intermediate level, 225 studying advanced level and 29 studying higher level apprenticeships. Exactly 314 apprentices are studying apprenticeship standards, with the remaining 245 on apprenticeship frameworks. PM Training offer qualifications across a range of sectors with the most popular being engineering and construction, business administration, and customer service. A large proportion of the learners have a poor experience of school education and low levels of attainment.

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?

As the period of national restrictions started in March, all training centres closed. Leaders quickly moved learning online. They provided laptop devices to those learners who did not have the equipment to access online learning. Where needed, paper-based resources were posted out to learners. Through a process of 'remobilisation', the learners returned to some face-to-face teaching, as national restrictions eased. Leaders continue to review this and – where there are local increases in the spread of COVID-19 – they revert to a 'quiet week', where learners receive more online teaching to reduce visits to the centre.

Leaders prioritised the well-being of staff, learners, and employers with which they work. They ensured regular contact with employers through the partnership support

team. They provided advice to the small- and medium-sized employers with which they work on the range of financial support that employers could access to support their own business.

Leaders shared how they faced different challenges across the different sectors in which they work, and across the range of provision that they offer. For example, in study programmes, there is a large work-placement element within the programme. Teacher-assessors have revisited the curriculum as learning moved online. New learners are studying a more substantial qualification as part of their study programme and have a slightly reduced work placement. Within apprenticeships, areas such as construction, where apprentices work to renovate local housing, saw an increase in demand. This was due to the increase in need for local social housing. In areas such as manufacturing, some apprentices were furloughed as workplace activity stopped. Most apprentices have now returned.

Leaders told inspectors how communication with staff, learners, and stakeholders is critical to their continued response to the pandemic. They continue to work with local partners and organisations to support their ongoing response. For example, they liaise with the local authority and local housing associations on best practice and risk assessments, so that they can ensure that activity is safe.

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?

Teacher-assessors summarised how they quickly responded to learning being moved online. They have access to a range of software and online learning tools to support their teaching. Teacher-assessors told inspectors how their confidence has improved over time in using the range of online tools available to them. For example, they use a virtual whiteboard through online communication tools better to share information with learners.

In sector areas such as warehousing, construction, and engineering there was more disruption to learning. Leaders reordered the curriculum and, in many cases, brought forward units on underpinning knowledge. As learners have returned to face-to-face teaching and workplace settings, more time is being provided so that learners can revisit their practical skills. Teacher-assessors have provided intensive 'catch up' sessions to those learners that need them. In areas such as business administration, managers reported how apprentices reacted very positively to remote learning. They found it more flexible around their job role.

Leaders ensured that the personal and social development part of the curriculum continued through remote learning. Learners continued to have weekly tutorial sessions as part of their learning programme. For example, learners were able to access a question-and-answer session with an employer, so that they continued to have employer engagement. Learners continued to be able to access careers advice

and guidance, which had been increased to reflect the changing nature of the jobs market.

Leaders shared how they have revisited their initial assessment processes to identify the starting points for new learners. They have increased these assessments to consider learners' motivation for learning, reflecting the fact that many learners have experienced disruption to their learning. Leaders continue to monitor how well the curriculum is meeting the needs of learners. They conduct regular 'virtual walk-throughs' to monitor the quality of education that learners are receiving.

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

Leaders updated the safeguarding policy to reflect the increase in remote learning and the associated risks. The 'acceptable behaviour policy' now sets clear expectations for learners when working online. Leaders have ensured that they have the correct information technology security and alerts systems, so that they can monitor safely the increase in online activity.

All learners have a caseworker who contacts them regularly. Using a 'traffic light' system, the provider identified those learners who may have been more vulnerable during the period of national restrictions. These learners receive more regular contact.

Leaders provided information to learners about how to keep themselves safe. They issued a well-being survey to find out about any concerns that learners may have. Leaders used this information to put on 'awareness sessions' for learners. For example, professionals from the local NHS trust delivered a session on safe relationships, including the risks of domestic violence.

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