

SW Durham Training Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54495
Name of lead inspector:	Jacque Brown, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	Durham Way South Aycliffe Business Park Newton Aycliffe County Durham DL5 6AT

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.

Information about the provider

SW Durham Training Limited is a registered charity and a training provider that provides study programmes for learners aged 16 to 19 years and apprenticeships in engineering. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Bishop Auckland College. Its main centre is in Newton Aycliffe and it operates across the north east of England. There are currently 57 learners on study programmes, 52 apprentices aged 16 to 18 years, and 46 apprentices aged 19 years and above. The vast majority of apprentices are enrolled on standards-based 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' priority, from the start of the COVID-19 restrictions, was to adapt the training centre to make it ready for learners and apprentices to return to face-to-face learning. Leaders adapted classrooms, moved seating areas, placed social distancing markings on floors, and introduced hand sanitising stations.

Leaders have fully reopened the training centre and have recruited more learners and apprentices than anticipated. However, they have had to limit the number of learners on electrical installations, and fabrication and welding programmes, due to the need to reduce the number of working bays to meet social distancing requirements. Leaders believe that the overall increase in numbers is due to the introduction of a level 3 study programme and the positive reputation that they developed with employers in responding to the pandemic.

Tutors monitor learners' progress each week and provide progress updates to leaders at monthly 'concern' meetings. During the COVID-19 restrictions, the provider's progress mentor contacted learners on study programmes when they fell behind with work. Tutors contacted employers if apprentices were not keeping on track with assignments.

Leaders have provided support to many apprentices to enable them to complete their end-point assessments remotely, through video recording their practical work and through carrying out online professional discussions. They explained that, in some instances, apprentices had to delay their end-point assessment until awarding bodies were able to return to on-site assessment.

Leaders have not seen any change to staff sickness levels during the pandemic, but they considered that some tutors were unable to work as productively when based at home. They have not experienced any negative impact on the recruitment and retention of staff. Leaders explained that they found the period of restrictions to be challenging as they tried to ensure that the business ran as smoothly as possible.

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 explained that, prior to the first period of restrictions, they provided little online learning. Therefore, they were not in a position to provide all learners and apprentices with live online teaching sessions when they closed the training centre. Most tutors placed resources and presentations on the existing virtual learning platform, which they also used to enable learners to submit assignments and receive feedback.

In preparation for the reopening of the training centre in September 2020, leaders invested in interactive technology in classrooms to enable tutors to teach lessons both to learners attending in person and those joining lessons remotely. This has enabled learners and apprentices who have had to self-isolate, to attend live lessons. All tutors received training in providing online learning.

Leaders plan to sustain the move to a blended model of teaching, with a mixture of face-to-face and online tuition. They believe that this model appeals to some employers who see the benefits of greater flexibility around the times when their employees can carry out training. The approach also enables employers located at a significant distance from the training centre to enrol their employees as apprentices.

Leaders and employers did not identify any regression in learners' and apprentices' knowledge during the period of restrictions. Due to some changes in staffing, prior to lockdown, they had already moved the practical elements to the early stages of most programmes. This enabled learners and apprentices to focus more on the knowledge components of the programmes when learning from home.

Tutors changed the order in which they taught the curriculum, to enable learners to catch up on components of programmes that could not be delivered during the period of restrictions. For example, in mechanical engineering, tutors taught the technical skills of using computer-aided design software at the beginning of the second year of the programme, when learners were able to return to the training centre, rather than in the first year.

Leaders explained how they ensure that learners and apprentices continue to receive careers advice and guidance through access to careers advisers at a local further education college.

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

Leaders have provided learners and apprentices with information about how to stay safe from the risk of infection during the pandemic. They have also continued to make learners and apprentices aware of other risks, such as radicalisation, extremism and county lines.

Staff have attended training on online safety. They explained how they have used this to raise learners' understanding of how to stay safe online, covering topics such as phishing, password protection and avoiding the disclosure of personal information.

Learners and apprentices know who to contact if they have a safeguarding concern. They said that they appreciate the way that leaders have made the site COVID-19 secure and protect them from the risks of infection. They support the way that staff challenge learners and apprentices who do not abide by the mandatory policy of mask wearing in communal areas.

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