

System Group Limited

Interim visit report

Unique reference number:	54726
Name of lead inspector:	Alison Humphreys, Her Majesty's Inspector
Visit dates:	10 to 11 December 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.

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

System Group Limited (SGL) is a national training provider specialising in training for the logistics and supply chain industry. SGL provides training programmes for adults to become van drivers and fork lift truck and warehouse operatives. They work with 15 subcontractors to provide a range of employability and adult skills training nationwide. SGL provides apprenticeship programmes from level 2 to level 5 and works with three subcontractors. Most apprentices study on large goods vehicles or leadership and management programmes. At the time of the visit, there were approximately 504 adult learners and 266 apprentices across England.

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 explained their main priority throughout COVID-19 restrictions was to continue to provide training to learners and apprentices. They feel they moved swiftly to provide online and remote teaching for learners and apprentices. Leaders invested in new technology and provided training to support staff to provide a mixture of face-to-face and remote learning. Leaders provided electronic devices to learners and apprentices who did not have access to information and communication technology equipment, so they could access learning online.

Leaders continued to recruit adult learners and apprentices during local restrictions. They introduced online enrolment and carried out digital skills assessments, so learners and apprentices could start their programmes in a timely manner.

Leaders and managers identified the need for extra support for adult learners. They created a learner liaison officer role to provide pastoral and safeguarding support. Leaders say this has improved the well-being of learners and helped them to develop their knowledge and skills ready for employment.

Leaders explained the difficulties with apprentices sitting their driver examinations for light goods vehicle programmes. They worked with a new awarding organisation to make adaptations to the final assessment. Leaders say this meant apprentices were able to complete their programmes. For example, they trained employer's staff to undertake witness testimonies for apprentices to accredit their knowledge and skills that they have developed on their programme.

Leaders and managers work with several stakeholders such as sector skills councils, job centre plus and a range of employers. Leaders feel they have responded quickly to requests to meet the changing needs of employer and skills shortages. They now provide short courses in warehouse operatives for short-term furloughed employees and the unemployed. This need has arisen because of increased demand in the logistics sector.

Stakeholders appreciate the levels of support received by leaders and managers. Subcontractors explained how they held provider network meetings to share policies and advised them on how to return to face-to-face delivery. They feel this support has helped them to return to classroom delivery safely.

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?

During the period of COVID-19 restrictions, several learners and apprentices were unable to complete their practical assessments. Staff put in place individual catch-up driver training sessions once the restrictions were lifted. They feel this supported learners and apprentices to complete the driving test and achieve their qualifications.

Managers explained how they have adapted delivery times to fit with the needs of their apprentices and employers. Skills coaches arrange observations and workshops to accommodate the new shift patterns and an increase in apprentices' workloads. For example, they carry out observations in the early hours of the morning and hold online workshops late in the evening. Employers speak highly of the changes made by SGL to support their apprentices.

Tutors and skills coaches received intensive training to develop their online teaching skills. Those who were skilled in using digital platforms shared their expertise with less confident colleagues. Skills coaches say they can now use the online whiteboard as an effective learning tool. They upload information about European Union driving hours for apprentices to share screens and discuss in groups with their peers.

Leaders and managers changed how they review the quality of teaching and learning. They now carry out observations and review recordings of online sessions to provide feedback to staff and identify improvements in their teaching practice. For example, they provided training for staff on how to ensure all learners and apprentices could contribute in online sessions. The use of a 'hands-up' approach enabled staff to monitor more closely the verbal contributions of all learners and apprentices.

Managers told us they continue to provide careers information advice and guidance to apprentices and learners. Employers provide up-to-date information about the career pathways in the sector. For example, warehousing learners find out about opportunities to progress into a back-office role or onto an apprenticeship programme.

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

Managers explained how they have introduced an online safety course on the digital platform and created a blog on their website about how to stay safe online. Tutors and skills coaches discuss 'hot topics' such as sharing data and online scams. They highlight issues such as domestic violence, mental health and isolation in the 'hot topics' emails that they send to apprentices and learners.

During routine calls with apprentices and learners, tutors and skills coaches check that they are following the correct COVID-19 guidelines. They talk about well-being and mental health issues with large goods vehicle apprentices who have been away from their families for long periods of time due to work schedules.

Leaders and managers explained the support they have given to adult learners when faced with homelessness. They work closely with external agencies to support learners needing accommodation. The learner liaison officer makes weekly checks. They feel this supports learners to continue with their qualifications.

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