

Inspection of Free To Learn Ltd

Inspection dates:

4 to 6 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Adult learning programmes

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Free to Learn (F2L) is an independent learning provider that runs short vocational courses aimed at adults who are seeking work. Their main site is in Hackney, East London. F2L also runs courses from other sites, in Doncaster and Rotherham. A large number of courses are taught online.

At the time of the inspection, F2L taught 114 learners, funded through the adult education budget. The vast majority of learners study level 1 or 2 certificates in employability skills, with additional certificates in retail knowledge, customer service, digital skills, health and social care and infection control. A smaller number of learners study specialist courses for working in contact centres or as welders. Twenty-four learners were studying English or mathematics courses at entry level. Most learners are referred to F2L through Jobcentre Plus.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Most learners attend all their lessons and are punctual. They learn in a calm and orderly environment. In online lessons, learners are respectful of their peers and wait their turn to answer questions. They demonstrate the collaborative team-working behaviours they need for a job.

Learners benefit from the helpful teaching they receive from their tutors. For example, learners in mathematics appreciate the patience demonstrated by their tutor, who provides them with clear, step-by-step instructions for how to solve equations. Tutors repeat instructions until all learners understand and can do the calculations. In these lessons, learners feel included and respected. On health and social care courses, learners who have not worked for some time quickly improve their self-esteem. They confidently speak in class in front of others. Learners feel optimistic about their future careers.

A significant minority of learners do not have a positive experience. Learners sometimes wait too long to get on to a course. They do not receive enough information about when the next block of learning is due to start. In a few instances, learners do not get timely confirmation of their results or their certificates. A few learners report that they do not get a guaranteed job interview at the end of the course. Learners wait too long before they find out about the jobs available in the NHS or meet an employer.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a clear rationale for the courses they offer. They work closely with employers to design programmes of learning for unemployed learners to gain the skills and qualifications they need to secure employment. For example, leaders have recently introduced a course focused on the customer service and business administration skills learners require to work in a range of roles within the healthcare sector. Most learners successfully achieve their qualifications.

Leaders and tutors consider carefully the order in which they teach key knowledge on short courses. In English, tutors build learners' confidence in speaking about their personal experiences before introducing more difficult conversation exercises. On entry-level mathematics courses, tutors teach learners how to recognise numbers before moving on to tasks such as calculating areas.

Leaders and managers do not plan effectively learners' overall programme of learning. For example, learners start with short courses on job search skills, where they learn how to write job applications and practise interview techniques. However, tutors do not recap these skills sufficiently at the end of learners' vocational short courses. Consequently, a high proportion of learners are not fully prepared for interviews and are unsuccessful in gaining jobs. The proportion of learners who progress into employment at the end of their programme is too low.

On most short courses, managers do not identify thoroughly learners' prior knowledge and skills before they start their course. For example, in a few instances, learners who want to work in the NHS already have experience of working in customer services and have previously studied digital skills. Learners are taught knowledge they already know and, as a result, they are not sufficiently challenged.

Most learners with special educational needs (SEN) do not get the specialist support they need. Managers do not identify accurately enough learners with dyslexia or autism. Tutors receive appropriate resources to support learners with SEN, but in most cases do not use these effectively to adapt their teaching.

Tutors are appropriately qualified and experienced. They draw effectively on their experience of working in health and social care. Tutors give learners real-life examples and clear explanations of what it is like to care for vulnerable adults. As a result, learners gain an appropriate understanding of what it is like to work in the health care sector. On digital skills short courses, tutors use their knowledge of social media well to help learners set up online blogs and personal profiles.

Tutors use skilfully a wide range of techniques to help learners remember key information and improve their skills. On entry-level English courses, tutors check at the beginning of the lesson what learners remember from previous lessons. For example, tutors check what learners can remember about formal and informal emails and repeat information where learners have gaps in their knowledge. Learners recall well the new knowledge they have rapidly gained, for instance when to use capital letters and full stops.

Tutors frequently teach learners about the importance of understanding each other's diverse cultures and backgrounds. For example, tutors set up discussions for learners in pairs to talk about the festivals they celebrate. Tutors teach learners effectively about legislation relevant for their intended employment. For example, in engineering short courses, learners understand what they need to do to apply for a welding licence. Learners on customer service short courses discuss confidently the consumer law related to the rights of individuals when purchasing faulty goods.

Learners at the end of their programme do not receive appropriate advice about their next steps. For example, learners who have successfully completed courses in nail technology do not know where they can go to study the next level of their course. Learners interested in jobs that are not linked to the course they studied do not benefit from information that helps them make informed decisions about their future career prospects.

Leaders have made little progress in establishing suitable governance arrangements. They have been too slow to put into place measures to help them assess accurately the strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. Leaders and managers lack reliable information about which learners stay and complete their short courses, and if they successfully gain jobs. While governors have appropriate backgrounds and experience, they are too new in their roles to challenge and support leaders meaningfully.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have put in place appropriate safeguarding policies, including those which address the 'Prevent' duty. Learners report that they feel safe, and can recall what they have been taught about how to keep themselves safe when learning online. However, leaders have not ensured that learners have a sufficient understanding of the risks of radicalisation or extremism or understand the risks they may face in the areas in which they live and work.

Staff responsible for safeguarding learners undertake relevant training for their roles. They form effective relationships with external organisations, such as mental health charities. They use these links appropriately to provide well-being support for learners.

Leaders keep tutors up to date with local safeguarding issues through frequent briefings. Tutors act appropriately to raise any concerns with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL acts quickly to help learners when they need it. Safeguarding cases are suitably recorded, with follow-up actions noted.

Leaders provide valuable welfare support to learners facing financial hardship. For example, they offer free meals over lunchtime in partnership with local businesses.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should identify accurately learners' prior knowledge, skills and experience at the start of their course. Leaders should develop a coherently structured programme of learning that better meets learners' needs so that they find employment at the end of their course more swiftly.
- Leaders should ensure that learners receive timely and effective careers advice and guidance at all stages of their course, so that they can make informed choices about their next steps.
- Leaders should ensure that governors and managers have access to reliable information about how well learners progress in their studies. They should use this information systematically to accurately identify where provision needs to improve, and put effective actions in place.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1247987
Address	263-265 Mare Street London E8 3NS
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Website	https://free2learn.org.uk/
Principal/CEO	Gabriel Ghersovic
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the vice principal (research and development), as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

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