

Free To Learn Ltd

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

Unique reference number:	1247987
Name of lead inspector:	Sue Hasty, His Majesty's Inspector
Inspection dates:	12 and 13 July 2023
Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
Address:	263-265 Mare Street London E8 3NS

Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Free to Learn Ltd (F2L) was inspected in May 2022. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in resolving the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

F2L is an independent learning provider that teaches a range of short vocational courses aimed at adults who are seeking work. These include the licence to practice as a door supervisor, the level 2 certificate in spectator safety, introduction to administration for working in the NHS, customer service skills for working in contact centres, and functional skills at entry level to level 2 in English and mathematics. The provider also teaches the nail technician course at level 2.

F2L's main site is in Hackney, East London. The provider also teaches courses in Doncaster, Sheffield and Barnsley.

At the time of the inspection, F2L taught 173 learners funded through the adult education budget.

Themes

To what extent have leaders improved how they identify accurately learners' prior knowledge, skills and experience at the start of the course? Significant progress
How effectively do leaders and managers use this information to plan a coherently structured programme of learning that meets learners' needs and leads to employment?

Leaders have developed a highly comprehensive process to assess learners' starting points. Staff collect a breadth of information about learners' prior knowledge, including knowledge of English and mathematics, work experience and career aspirations before they start the course. They find out about any health conditions and additional learning needs that learners have so that they can help learners choose employment that fits around their needs and responsibilities.

Managers and teachers use this information very effectively to plan a well-designed personalised programme of learning that takes account of learners' needs and long-term goals. For example, teachers of English and mathematics make sure they plan their lessons around the specific gaps that learners have in their knowledge of these subjects.

Leaders and managers plan a highly effective curriculum that enables learners to gain extra qualifications in addition to their main programme. For example, learners study customer service, first aid and team leading courses before they take the level 2 door supervisor course. Learners gain a broad set of industry relevant qualifications that lead directly to employment and strengthen their curriculum vitae (CV).

Learners benefit greatly from the teaching they receive. Teachers include particularly useful topics in lessons that teach learners about professional behaviours for work. For example, on spectator safety courses, teachers give learners activities that require them to work in groups to plan an event in a large arena. Learners gain highly appropriate teamworking skills. They value the chance to practise these skills in a safe learning environment.

Leaders have improved learners' progression into employment substantially. Over half the learners on vocational courses gain employment at the end of the course. Leaders check the reliability of this information robustly through frequent phone calls and emails with learners and employers.

How effectively do leaders provide learners with timely careers guidance at all stages of their course so that they can make informed choices about their next steps?

Significant progress

Leaders and managers have carefully considered how and when learners receive careers advice and guidance. They make sure that staff and teachers reinforce and revisit learners' career goals at every stage of learners' programmes. Learners now benefit from a wide variety of support that keeps them focused on gaining employment.

Staff in the learner recruitment and employability teams are appropriately qualified. They provide learners with high-quality information and advice. Learners value the ongoing support they get after their course finishes until they progress into further learning or work.

Leaders and managers have developed strong and effective relationships with organisations such as the National Careers Service (NCS) and local housing partnership groups. Staff from these organisations provide learners with a range of helpful strategies to find employment. For example, in Hackney and Doncaster, NCS advisers hold workshops that support learners with CV writing, interview skills and one-to-one advice on their next steps. Learners benefit from help with building an action plan that breaks down what they need to do to meet their short- and long-term career goals.

Leaders and managers work actively with employers to make learners aware of the specific roles and responsibilities of the jobs available to them. Employers visit courses to talk about the details of their job vacancies, including the pay rates, the

working hours and the physical demands. Learners gain a realistic overview of the jobs so that they can make an informed choice before making an application.

Teachers use their highly relevant industry knowledge and experience to inform learners about career options. For example, nail technician teachers help learners to understand the legislative requirements for becoming self-employed. Teachers of the level 2 door supervisor course explain in detail the distinct types of settings in the security industry that learners can work in.

To what extent have leaders improved the information that governors and managers have access to about how well learners progress in their studies? How well do governors and managers use this information to identify where provision needs to improve and put effective actions in place?

Reasonable progress

Senior leaders have worked tenaciously on tackling the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. They have put a range of effective measures in place. For example, leaders invested in their learner information system so that they now have a relevant suite of reliable management reports. Leaders and managers use this improved management information to intervene much more quickly when concerns arise, such as a dip in attendance rates. By carefully analysing the information, leaders and managers take appropriate action to rectify issues, such as providing extra support for learners who are struggling, or professional development for teachers.

Advisory board members support leaders effectively to make changes to the leadership team. They have created a new senior leader position whose role is to make sure that staff and advisers have access to timely and accurate management information. Leaders agreed with board members a set of performance indicators through which to evaluate the effectiveness of the quality of education. Board members challenge leaders robustly to make sure they are on track with the targets they have identified in their improvement action plan.

Since the previous inspection, the membership of the advisory board has changed. Leaders have yet to establish a consistent group of advisory board members. Members of the board who have recently joined have attended one meeting. They have not been in place long enough to question leaders with sufficient insight. Consequently, they have an emerging overview of the progress learners make. Board members particularly note the increase in the number of learners moving into employment. They rightly acknowledge the improvements made in the clarity of information that leaders present at board meetings. Leaders have plans in place to imminently recruit two new board members with highly relevant experience as senior leaders in further education.

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