

Inspection of Icon Vocational Training Limited

Inspection dates: 10–13 December 2019

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Requires improvement
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Information about this provider

Icon Vocational Training Limited (Icon) is based in Newport, Wales. It mainly specialises in apprenticeships for the leisure and sport industry across England. Leaders and managers work with approximately 118 employers within the leisure and sport industry, along with a small number of employers within the customer service industry.

Icon offers apprenticeships in a variety of subjects, such as sport and physical activity, leadership and management, and business support services.

At the time of the inspection, there were 309 apprentices, with approximately one third completing apprenticeship frameworks and the remainder on standards-based apprenticeships. Levels range from level 2 through to level 5, with the majority of the apprentices studying at level 2.

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

The majority of apprentices develop confidence which helps them to perform better in their job roles. Most are motivated and have positive attitudes which help them keep on track with their learning. In a few instances, apprentices lose motivation due to the infrequent visits from teaching coaches.

On too many occasions, leaders and managers do not plan and sequence the curriculum to take into account the previous experiences of apprentices. For example, due to their previous employment experiences, some apprentices need longer to study subjects such as anatomy and physiology and less time to study how to support clients. As a result, these apprentices do not develop significant new knowledge for their vocational areas rapidly enough.

Most apprentices benefit from the frequent verbal feedback they receive from their teaching coaches. This helps apprentices understand the strengths of their work and the areas they need to improve. For a minority of apprentices, feedback is limited and provides little opportunity for them to make the improvements they need.

A significant number of apprentices with large employers in the leisure industry gain promotion due to their participation in the apprenticeship programme.

Apprentices gain a good understanding of how to work with customers and colleagues from diverse backgrounds.

Apprentices feel safe and know how to report any issues or concerns.

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

Leaders and managers are clear in their aim to develop the workforce within the leisure industry through apprenticeship programmes. However, the engagement with smaller employers to develop ambitious programmes is not as successful as it is with the large employers. Too often, the curriculum is not tailored to individual apprentices. This results in all apprentices following the same curriculum, regardless of their starting points.

Leaders, managers and teaching coaches do not plan off-the-job training well enough. A few teaching coaches are not clear about what activities contribute to off-the-job training. As a result, they do not encourage apprentices to pursue opportunities that broaden and extend their theoretical knowledge.

Leaders and managers do not effectively plan apprentices' on-the-job programmes with the smaller employers. They do not plan work tasks and the units studied logically so that apprentices make good progress. For example, apprentices do not develop new work skills and knowledge to further their performance and contributions to the workplace. However, large employers provide on-the-job learning for apprentices that enables them to build on their previous skills. As a

result, sports apprentices learn how to design programmes to promote the physical health and well-being of their customers.

Most teaching coaches provide apprentices with helpful feedback on their assessed work. This helps apprentices to understand the strengths of their work and the areas that they need to improve. However, when assessing work, teaching coaches do not prioritise the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills. They do not routinely comment on English or mathematical skills and how to enhance them. This results in a lack of challenge for some apprentices to develop these skills, which has a negative impact on their longer-term learning and progression opportunities.

Most apprentices have a good understanding of how they are assessed during their apprenticeship. They have an appropriate awareness and focus on their end-point assessment. Teaching coaches provide adequate guidance to apprentices on how to structure and organise evidence. For those apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships, teaching coaches explain the standard of work that is required to achieve a distinction grade. For example, they provide apprentices with mock professional discussions in preparation for end-point assessments, which enhances apprentices' skills and confidence.

Too many apprentices do not develop new behaviours because many of them have acquired these through previous roles at work within associated industries, such as retail. Those apprentices who are new to the industry do develop appropriate behaviours. For example, apprentices on level 2 customer service apprenticeships improve their self-confidence, particularly with regards to delivering presentations to the public or to people they do not know.

Leaders and managers have not yet implemented a staff development programme that provides teaching coaches with sufficient opportunities to develop their pedagogical skills and subject knowledge. As a result, teaching coaches do not consistently deliver high-quality training to apprentices. For example, in some instances, apprentices do not have substantive face-to-face vocational subject learning time with teaching coaches and rely on their own research to complete assignments.

Not all apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance. In particular, this is less effective for apprentices with smaller employers. Apprentices do not receive clear enough information about their programme and where it sits in the wider training and education pathways. As a result, apprentices are not always supported well enough to explore the wider career options open to them.

Leaders and managers have only recently identified that there has been a long-term decline in the quality of the provision. They have started to put in place improvement actions to address these issues and these are only just beginning to have a positive impact.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Most apprentices have a sound understanding of safeguarding. Designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained. Staff and apprentices know how to report any safeguarding concerns they may have. Designated safeguarding leads have appropriate systems in place to manage any disclosures thoroughly. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe in the workplace, including from the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers must improve the quality of education across all apprenticeship programmes to enable apprentices to develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours.
- Leaders and managers must involve employers to ensure that on- and off-the-job activities are coordinated more effectively in order to develop and implement a comprehensive training plan for apprentices.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that apprentices receive high-quality, timely visits and reviews so that apprentices are kept on track with their learning.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that teaching coaches are provided with opportunities to develop their pedagogical skills and subject expertise.
- Leaders and managers must ensure that all apprentices receive impartial careers advice and guidance to enable them to have a better understanding of the full range of progression opportunities available to them.

Provider details

Unique reference number	52434
Address	61 Newport Road Caldicot NP26 4BR
Contact number	01291 423 655
Website	www.icon-training.com
Principal/CEO	Julian Leybourne
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	24 February 2012
Main subcontractors	none

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, 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 observing 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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