

# Ensis Solutions Limited

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 1276475

**Name of lead inspector:** Alastair Mollon, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 30 September – 1 October 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. We intend to return to routine inspection in January 2021 but will keep the exact timing under review.

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**

Ensis Solutions Limited is based in Leigh, Greater Manchester. Currently, 234 apprentices study on programmes at levels 2, 3 and 5. All of these are on standards-based apprenticeships, with the large majority following programmes in health and social care (adult care) in care homes. The remaining apprentices study team leader, operational management, customer service practitioner and business administrator standards. All apprentices are over 19 years of age.

### **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 and managers have continued to deliver broadly the same curriculum since the start of the pandemic. Leaders and managers immediately involved employers in establishing new ways of working. They re-evaluated how they operate and feel that the COVID-19 restrictions has given them the motivation to make the move to online delivery for apprentices in care homes.

Leaders feel that they have faced significant challenges, with staff working from home and the subsequent lack of social interaction. They identify that many apprentices in the care sector struggled with online training and access to the curriculum. Leaders have invested in training for staff and apprentices to use information technology (IT). The local council has provided a grant for the purchase of IT equipment. Apprentices have been able to take out laptop computers on loan. Apprentices are now working online.

Leaders believe that they have allayed some of the negative effects of restrictions by using shorter and bite-sized sessions to provide the flexibility that apprentices working in care homes need to continue their learning. They have adjusted online

learning session times to accommodate apprentices' shift patterns. Employers appreciate this flexibility.

The move to online meetings has brought efficiency benefits that leaders will seek to keep post-pandemic. For example, online staff meetings have reduced the need for unnecessary travel time and enable staff to spend more time supporting apprentices to develop new knowledge and skills. Staff say that communication internally and with employers and apprentices has 'never been better'.

Leaders have worked with awarding organisations, employers and apprentices to ensure that adaptations can be made to assessment processes so that apprentices can continue to make progress. Staff have delayed the delivery of practical aspects until they can be done 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?**

Leaders and managers have enhanced their existing quality assurance arrangements by including informal virtual 'sit-ins' of online learning sessions. Tutors say that these sit-ins provide them with support to quickly improve their practice.

Leaders and managers state that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the curriculum by not giving apprentices the opportunity to complete the practical element of their apprenticeship. The planned rotational experiences of apprentices in hospitals has been deferred until it is safe for apprentices to attend. This training includes basic life support, moving and handling, wound care, catheter hygiene, medicine safety and canula hygiene. All are integral aspects of apprentices' training that are currently unavailable. Leaders feel that this could have a negative impact on apprentices' future career choices and progression into the NHS.

Leaders and managers have developed a three-stage intervention process to ensure that apprentices who are not engaging in learning are supported to re-engage in their programme. Employers we spoke to say that they use online platforms to share information on apprentices' progress, which allows both employers and trainers to provide additional support should apprentices fall behind.

Tutors feel that they are committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, apprentices' learning is not adversely affected by the pandemic. They have arranged additional, virtual visits to support apprentices and employers. Where apprentices have fallen behind, tutors provide online support sessions to help them to catch up.

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

Leaders identified an increase in apprentices' anxiety due to isolation throughout the restrictions. A number of apprentices have experienced grief in their personal lives

and in the workplace due to the pandemic. Managers have provided additional training for all staff so that they have strategies and information to support these apprentices.

Staff receive regular safeguarding training that they share with apprentices to keep them safe. For example, apprentices have recently received training on the protocols they must follow while learning online and how to stay safe on social media.

Staff appreciate the welfare support they receive from managers related to their mental health and well-being. They feel that the company is looking after them and their apprentices. Staff and apprentices say that they feel safe. Apprentices feel that they have a good appreciation of the high standards of safeguarding that they need to comply with as practitioners in the care sector.

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