

# Northamptonshire Industrial Training Association Limited

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	53534
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Bob Hamp, Her Majesty's Inspector
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<b>Type of provider:</b>	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

Established in 1969, Northamptonshire Industrial Training Association Limited (NITAL) is an industry training organisation. In October 2015 it opened its engineering skills training academy to provide theoretical and practical engineering training for local young people. At the time of the visit there were 100 apprentices. All but a small minority were on standards-based apprenticeships at level 3 in engineering, manufacturing and business. The large majority of apprentices study engineering-related programmes. The largest groups are engineering technicians mechatronics, machinist, maintenance (including electrotechnical) and technical support. A minority study business administration, customer service and team leader/supervisor.

### **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 report that engineering businesses were affected negatively by the pandemic. Apprenticeship recruitment fell sharply. NITAL's training centre closed and leaders moved the teaching to online learning.

Leaders supplied apprentices and staff with the right equipment to support online learning. Arrangements to support apprentices online were affected by employers' response to the pandemic. For example, key worker apprentices in the food industry worked longer hours and furloughed apprentices could not access the workplace. Due to changes in work patterns leaders moved to individualised learning plans for apprentices, which were supported by an assessor.

Staff maintained close contact with apprentices and employers to assure that all submitted work was marked and recorded in the online platform and shared at

progress reviews. Leaders supported the increase in submitted work generated through this process by employing an additional assessor.

Apprentices and employers reported the absence of practical training for engineering apprentices. Leaders recognise this and that apprentices missed the teaching sessions in the training centre. During lockdown training relied on theoretical work being set through the online platform and employers reported that assessors maintained a good level of support and communication.

Concerns for the mental health of staff and apprentices during the pandemic resulted in leaders commissioning specialist training to support them. This is ongoing.

Leaders recognise the need to learn from the feedback they have received to improve teaching online. They understand that online learning can be delivered more easily for business apprentices but needs substantial development for engineers. Lockdown has reinforced the importance of employer visits to leaders.

Staff understand the need to capture as much information as possible at each review to develop apprentices' skills and to maintain careers advice and guidance.

**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?**

Following the move to online learning, apprentices reported that submitted work was returned quickly and this aided their progress. Apprentices and employers reported that online reviews were organised swiftly and all forms of acceptable evidence gathering was encouraged.

Engineering staff reported that they could only provide knowledge-based activities and that they were faced with a lack of appropriate online resources. As a result, apprentices received very little teaching during lockdown. Leaders are aware of the need to find ways to support online learning more effectively and have been actively engaged in research and development.

For engineering apprentices online learning consisted of theory-based questions that required a lot of writing. Employers report that they were disappointed with the lack of practical assessment opportunities and they felt that apprentices could have been offered more online activities, for example practical demonstrations.

Where possible, leaders arranged for employers to deliver practical training. Assessors brokered a change in units for some apprentices from, for example, lathe turning, which can only be completed at the centre, to a fitting unit, which can be completed at the workplace. The few training videos that were uploaded were welcomed by apprentices and employers. Business administration and customer

service apprentices were able to complete their knowledge, skills and understanding more easily.

Leaders arranged for weekly team meetings with staff to consider improvement actions. Assessors used the online platform to measure the progress and gaps in learning of each apprentice. Managers used it to monitor the frequency of assessor contact with apprentices and to check that learning and assessment was completed.

On returning to the training centre, leaders have prioritised classes for apprentices that are near completion. They ensure that all apprentices have an updated learning plan which allows them to complete the apprenticeship in the agreed timeline.

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

Leaders use a COVID-19 risk assessment to help managers ensure the safety of all learning environments used by apprentices and staff. This includes the use of the track and trace application and frequent deep cleaning to mitigate the risk of transmission of the virus.

Staff report increased access to computer applications, following the move to online learning. In response, leaders and managers have prioritised a substantial development of their cloud storage. This provides apprentices and staff with a safe digital environment to work in.

Apprentices report that they are clear who to contact if they have a safeguarding issue. They recall domestic violence, county lines, modern slavery and oppression as issues discussed at reviews.

Vulnerable and at-risk apprentices have more frequent contact with their assessors. Apprenticeship reviews include confirmation of individual needs. On return to the centre apprentices report that they feel safe.

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