

# Icon Vocational Training Limited

Interim visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 52434

**Name of lead inspector:** Judy Lye-Forster, HMI

**Visit date(s):** 18–19 November 2020

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** 61 Newport Road  
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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.

Following changes to government guidance and the imposition of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, we made this visit remotely to reduce pressure on the provider.

### Information about the provider

Icon Vocational Training Limited (Icon) is based in Newport, Wales. Icon offers apprenticeships in a variety of subjects, such as sport and physical activity, business support services, and leadership and management. Leaders and managers work with approximately 37 employers mainly within the leisure and sport industry, along with a small number of employers within the customer service and business administration industry.

At the time of the visit, there were 122 apprentices studying at level 2 or level 3. Approximately two thirds were completing apprenticeship frameworks and the remainder were on standards-based apprenticeships.

### **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?**

At the start of the national COVID-19 restrictions over 95% of the employers which Icon work with went into immediate lockdown which, leaders report, caused a great deal of confusion for apprentices. Many apprentices were furloughed, so unable to continue with their apprenticeship for the entire period of restrictions, and some were made redundant.

Icon also went into lockdown and furloughed the majority of its staff for four months, leaders report that this resulted in them having no income throughout this period. Leaders said that a skeleton staff were kept on until mid-April to deal with enquiries and to reach out to employers and apprentices, but they did not get much response.

Leaders and managers told us that they undertook a review of the curriculum to decide how best to adapt it to a virtual environment. They made adaptations that include covering much of the theoretical elements of the curriculum earlier in the programme and preparing apprentices for end-point assessment (EPA) virtually. Leaders feel that the level of support and guidance apprentices have received for their EPA has been much more rigorous because of the online teaching and support given.

Leaders noted that their biggest challenge going forward is online tests and invigilation and that although the guidance from awarding bodies has improved they feel they have been slow to provide support and guidance to training providers.

Leaders report that Icon's business has been heavily affected because the sport and leisure industries have been severely impacted by the pandemic. Leaders have decided to adjust the sector areas they focus on going forward to alleviate some of the risk associated with focusing predominantly on the leisure and sport industry. They report having already had interest from sector areas that remain functional during restrictions, such as construction and essential retail.

### **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?**

Managers report that the introduction of online learning has increased teachers' contact with apprentices. Teachers described how they have identified gaps in apprentices' knowledge and skills through one-to-one discussions, quizzes, and the completion of mock assessments.

Teachers expressed gratitude for what they describe as the 'gift of time' to develop online teaching and learning and to have more-frequent contact with apprentices. They value the monthly standardisation meetings to review the curriculum and revise teaching resources. Teachers report introducing new activities and resources, for example the use of a video on the workings of the heart, to stimulate discussion. They describe how online learning has provided opportunities to embed mathematics and English in the curriculum.

Teachers told us that they work with employers to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of the employers and the apprentices. Employers value the flexibility which online learning provides for apprentices who work shifts.

Managers report that apprentices who have been made redundant or those at risk of redundancy are supported to complete their apprenticeship. Teachers told us that these apprentices benefit from careers information and advice to identify alternative employment opportunities and support to prepare their curriculum vitae. Recently introduced arrangements for partial completion provide apprentices with validated evidence of the knowledge and skills they have gained through their apprenticeship.

Managers report that during the current COVID-19 restrictions apprentices are more engaged and are requesting more learning from their teachers. Teachers explained that apprentices are keen to complete their apprenticeships in case they are made redundant. They report that some of the apprentices who are furloughed face barriers to learning that include digital poverty as they do not have access to their employers' computers and internet access. Apprentices restricted to their mobile phones are more likely to be reticent to participate in learning.

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

Leaders told us that on return from furlough, after the national COVID-19 restrictions, they prioritised training staff in online safety and raising their awareness of COVID-19. They said that apprentices had the opportunity to undertake a certificate in COVID-19 awareness and were required to do online safety training. The few apprentices spoken to reported that they already knew how to keep safe online and have not needed to increase their understanding. For example, apprentices working in schools said they understand that they require the school's permission to video a session.

Leaders said they prioritise checking on the mental health of apprentices and staff. Staff value the weekly online coffee morning which they attend to check on each other's well-being. Apprentices receive welfare calls to see how they are coping.

Leaders report introducing online safety into the enrolment process for new apprentices, to keep them safe on their course and in their personal life.

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