



Arolygiaeth Ei Fawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on the work-based learning provision of

Educ8 Training Group Ltd

**Tredomen Gateway
Tredomen Park
Ystrad Mynach
Hengoed
CF82 7EH**

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by

**Estyn, His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and
Training in Wales**

About Educ8 Training Group Ltd

Educ8 Training Group, an independent training company, became a Welsh Government lead provider for the delivery of apprenticeship programmes at the start of the contract in 2021. The provider is a long standing private-sector training provider, which is an employee owned trust. Currently, Educ8 works with four sub-contracting partners, Academa Talent, CWBL, PeoplePlus and Abbeydale Vets. Educ8 and its partners deliver programmes pan-Wales, with a partner delivers health and social care programmes in the Wrexham area of north Wales. Educ8 delivers apprenticeships to approximately 2500 learners and employs nearly 200 members of staff. Educ8 and its partners deliver apprenticeship programmes at levels 1 to 5 in the following learning areas:

- Advice & Guidance
- Animal Care
- Beauty
- Business Administration
- Childcare
- Clinical Healthcare Support
- Customer Service
- Digital Marketing
- Equine
- Hairdressing & Barbering
- Health & Social Care
- Healthcare Science
- Health and Social Care (Children and Young People)
- Leadership & Management
- Social Media for Business
- Digital Learning Practitioner
- Project Management

Summary

Most learners make sound progress developing their practical skills and theory knowledge that is closely matched to their work roles. A few learners develop higher levels of competence and knowledge. They use these skills well when carrying out daily tasks in the workplace. Nearly all learners are motivated and enthusiastic about their programmes and know what they need to do to make progress.

Across Educ8 and its partners, trainer coaches plan assessments and off-the-job sessions well and many provide effective teaching, training and assessment activities to learners. The provider has invested significantly in its virtual learning environment for both learners and staff and includes professionally developed content that is easily accessible to learners, staff and delivery partners. The provider works particularly well with a wide range of employers delivering programmes across many learning areas. The largest area the provider and its partners deliver training in is in health and social care, the provider also delivers small volume provision in veterinary nursing and equine. Most learners receive good personal support from their trainer coaches. They are flexible in their interactions with learners and a few have been trained as mental first aiders. These staff can help to identify and discuss issues learners may have before referring them to specialist support when a need is identified.

The provider's senior managers provide clear strategic direction for the delivery of its apprenticeship contract. Senior managers have been effective in supporting and empowering its staff particularly in developing staff's skills in the delivery and assessment of apprenticeship programmes. The provider's procedures for self-evaluation are comprehensive. Although the provider has a clear focus on improving learner outcomes, they are variable between learning areas. A minority of learners in health and care programmes complete their learning programmes. This reflects differences in the rates at which learners are leaving their jobs as well as the impact of factors linked to the introduction of new qualifications and ongoing disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which learners achieve their apprenticeships
- R2 Where appropriate, make sure that trainer coaches adapt their teaching and learning activities to support effective learning

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Estyn will invite the provider to prepare case studies on its work in relation to its development of its comprehensive virtual learning environment and the training of three members of staff to become mental health first aiders, for dissemination on Estyn's website.

Main findings

Learning

Learners working in sectors such as social media, digital and management generally make strong progress. In those sectors most impacted by COVID-19 and staffing shortages, such as health and social care, childcare and hair and beauty, learners often find it more difficult to progress with their learning and achieve their apprenticeships.

Many learners demonstrate appropriate prior knowledge and experience and speak confidently about these experiences. They use and apply learning confidently and purposefully within their work roles, for example where level 3 childcare learners explain how to mitigate risks of infections, such as strep throat, and where one apprentice developed a useful outbreak log for use in their workplace.

Most learners on higher apprenticeship programmes are aware of the progress they are making and what they need to do to complete their apprenticeships. Management learners demonstrate strong ownership of their learning and many plan the sequencing of assessment targets carefully to match work schedules and priorities.

Many learners are aware of their key areas for development in their literacy, numeracy and digital skills as a result of completing initial and diagnostic assessments. Although a majority of learners are actively developing these skills through essential skills sessions and the use of supporting learning materials, a few have not made enough progress in improving these skills.

Most learners produce written work that is well presented and of at least an appropriate standard. Most work produced electronically contains few spelling or grammatical errors and the majority of portfolios are well organised. Many learners demonstrate appropriate knowledge of technical terminology relevant to their learning area. For example, learners on veterinary nursing programmes identify and name different types of urinary tract infections in cats and dogs. In a few cases, learners apply their numeracy skills well in their workplaces.

Most learners use technology effectively when undertaking learning activities. These learners navigate and access beneficial learning materials through the provider's virtual learning environment and make effective use of online meeting platforms. They routinely use this resource to upload and share content with trainer coaches and other learners.

Many learners improve their awareness of the value of Welsh language skills in the workplace by undertaking the Prentis-laith learning module. Very few learners are fluent Welsh speakers and a few of these learners choose to complete their written assessments through the medium of Welsh.

Many learners interact confidently with their trainer coaches and other learners in one-to-one and group sessions during both face-to-face activities and those delivered online. They demonstrate effective speaking and listening skills, respond well to

questioning and feedback and are comfortable in seeking clarification about any issues of which they are unsure.

A few learners on higher level programmes are highly articulate and demonstrate high level thinking skills. For example, learners make informed comparisons and evaluations of different options for producing multimedia presentations as part of their preparations for controlled assessments in digital literacy.

Most learners develop and apply a wide range of relevant skills and knowledge in their workplace. As a result, they become valued members of staff and, where appropriate, progress to more responsible job roles and higher-level programmes. In a very few cases, such as in hairdressing, the skills demonstrated by learners are particularly strong and of a level higher than those normally associated with the qualification level they are working towards.

Apprenticeship success rates vary substantially between occupational sectors. The majority of leavers on business and management, equine and advice and guidance programmes complete their apprenticeships successfully. By comparison, a minority of leavers on health and care programmes successfully complete their programmes. This reflects substantial differences in the rates at which learners are leaving their jobs as well as the impact of factors linked to the introduction of new qualifications and ongoing disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, timely completion rates are substantially lower than pre-pandemic levels. These rates are distorted by a much higher proportion of learners extending the duration of their learning programmes.

Well-being and attitudes to learning

Nearly all learners are positive about their programmes and engage well in their learning sessions. Most learners are well motivated and enthusiastic. They engage fully in practical activities and discussions. In addition, they interact with trainer coaches and each other with confidence and respect.

Most learners receive useful information from the provider when choosing their learning programme. They express high levels of satisfaction with the programmes that they undertake, which are tailored to their individual requirements, for example by incorporating any additional support required to meet their learning needs.

Most learners receive good personal support from their trainer coaches. For example, trainer coaches have ensured that learners undertaking animal care qualifications are on the most suitable level for them considering the additional time commitment. Most learners speak very positively about the information available on the intranet and through their trainer coaches and how this supports them in both their professional and personal lives particularly in terms of their mental health and their understanding about sustainability.

Learners' well-being is supported well following the increase in referrals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners' concerns are recorded on reviews and discussed in pastoral sessions. Learners use the provider's virtual learning platform to access support through links to organisations offering specialist support. In the best cases,

learners have shown resilience in continuing their learning journey despite facing complex personal and workplace challenges. Many learners improve their confidence and engage well with their trainer coaches to agree assessment targets. Most learners feel safe, secure and free from harassment in the workplace and when undertaking off-the-job activities. A very few learners do not have a full understanding of safeguarding procedures.

Most learners say that trainer coaches help them to understand and to respect people from different backgrounds. Learners have access to, and use well, an online platform that provides information and training about equality, diversity and inclusion and about preventing radicalisation. In addition, a beneficial monthly topic ensures that learners cover relevant diversity issues such as black history month.

Most learners believe that they are consulted well and that their concerns and views are listened to and acted upon by the provider. For example, learners have received suitable adjustments to their core tests to take account of their additional learning needs following requests to trainer coaches. In most cases, learners' programme delivery is tailored to meet their needs and requirements. For example, following discussion with learners, trainer coaches have adopted a blended approach of face-to-face and online sessions.

Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

The provider is responsive to the needs of its employers and to the regional economy. It delivers a wide range of programmes based on its expertise and employer demand. The provider works effectively with its partners to deliver existing programmes including niche provision such as veterinary nursing and equine. A strength of the provision is that in the majority of cases the structure and content of learning programmes are planned in collaboration with employers. In these cases, optional or additional units are discussed with employers to make sure they are a closer match to the learners' work role. Where learners have limited access to suitable information technology equipment, the provider allocates digital equipment including laptops, mouse devices and webcams.

The provider invested in the development of its trainer coaches to support remote delivery prior to the pandemic. This was beneficial during the time of the pandemic when online delivery was a key part of keeping learners engaged. Currently, the provider delivers a hybrid model that allows flexibility in their delivery that is negotiated with learners and employers at the start of training. The provider offers beneficial progression routes for learners onto higher level programmes. The provider is measured when matching learners to programme levels, carefully considering the needs of employers to learners' aspirations and prior experience and qualifications.

Many trainer coaches provide well-planned and structured sessions that develop learners' practical and theory knowledge and understanding well. In nearly all cases, they contextualise and focus learners on their workplace skills. In many cases, trainer coaches set an appropriate pace for sessions and, as a result, learners are engaged throughout the session. In a few cases, the session pace is either too fast or the session too dominated by the trainer coach. In these sessions the trainer coach gives a large amount of information and covers a lot of programme content but learners sit

passively for extended periods of time. Trainer coaches undertake a wide range of activities to support learners and use a variety of methods to support learner engagement. In many cases, trainer coaches skilfully combine theory, progress reviews and assessment feedback.

In many off-the-job and remote sessions, trainer coaches use high quality digital resources well to engage learners and create productive sessions. These resources are available across nearly all learning areas and provide a digital 'go to' resource to support knowledge and understanding. Trainer coaches maintain regular contact with their learners, they are particularly flexible in meeting learners' personal support needs. This means that assessors may meet with learners more regularly due to any identified need. They track and help learners plan their progress through their learning programmes well. In the best cases, trainer coaches negotiate challenging targets for the completion of assessments. When forward targets are agreed with learners they are generally challenging and consider workplace and home commitments. However, in a few instances, especially at higher levels, trainer coaches do not involve learners well enough in target-setting.

Trainer coaches have relevant and up-to-date industrial experience, which they use well when discussing learners' work with them and helping them reflect on their learning. These staff are skilful and knowledgeable regarding the content of programmes and adapt their delivery strategies to meet the needs of most learners. Trainer coaches know their learners well; they develop a comprehensive understanding of their personal and vocational development needs that fosters respect and trust. Trainer coaches develop strong working relationships with employers and in the best cases employers are an active participant in the learning programme. In particularly strong examples, employers have a designated coach within the workplace who acts as the workplace trainer mentor.

Many trainer coaches set high expectations for learners and in the best cases use questioning well to challenge learners to reflect on their learning and extend their understanding. However, in a very few cases, trainer coaches do not use questioning well enough. Trainer coaches provide purposeful feedback to learners on their performance. In the best cases feedback is detailed and constructive and clearly states what learners need to do to improve. Most learners receive useful verbal and written feedback on how they can improve their work. Trainer coaches support learners to consider feedback and questions carefully to ensure that they clearly understand what they need to do.

Trainer coaches make sure that learners undertake essential skills initial assessment for literacy, numeracy and digital skills. However, they do not routinely support those learners who already hold appropriate qualifications in literacy, numeracy and digital skills to develop their skills further.

Where appropriate, trainer coaches use meaningful opportunities to actively support learners to develop their Welsh language skills. During induction, learners complete a basic Welsh awareness unit. Many trainer coaches ensure that learners take opportunities to develop and focus on the value of Welsh language skills in the context of their work.

Care, support and guidance

The provider knows its learners well and trainer coaches establish and maintain supportive working relationships with learners. Trainer coaches are mindful of their learners' skills and preferred ways of working as well as their personal and work circumstances. Nearly all trainer coaches regularly check on learners' well-being during review meetings and many sensitively adapt their teaching and assessment approaches to meet the well-being needs of learners. For example, trainer coaches identify when learners prone to anxiety are struggling and adopt careful questioning approaches to help them regain their composure and confidence.

Middle leaders work with a suitable range of external agencies to guide individual learners towards specialist support where appropriate. When learners need specialist support for well-being and mental health, they can access the provider's trainer coaches that are qualified as mental health first aiders. These staff give learners good levels of support and can refer them to specialist support from a wide range of external agencies when a need is identified. As a result of this support, learners who may have left their programmes have been supported to remain in training and achieve their apprenticeships. In response to the identified increase in mental health and workload issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the provider promptly introduced professional learning for all trainer coaches on effective pastoral care for learners. The provider also improved the well-being resources directly available to learners through its virtual learning environment. These include valuable information and interactive activities that promote good mental, as well as physical, health and well-being. The full range of these resources are offered to the provider's sub-contractor partners, as well as the provider's own learners.

The provider analyses and acts upon the main messages and trends in the feedback it obtains from learners. For example, the provider improved the range, quality and interactivity of resources available on the virtual learning environment in direct response to learner survey results. Senior leaders have identified opportunities to improve learner voice arrangements, and they have recently changed their approach to gaining feedback from learners at different stages of their programmes to involve thematic focus groups. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact of these of these changes.

The provider gives helpful advice and guidance to prospective learners and their employers. Staff members carefully consider the level of study of which learners are capable. They monitor progress and, where appropriate, transfer learners to higher or lower levels during the early stages of their programmes. However, in the health and social care sector, the provider, together with its partner employers, has recently struggled to ensure that individuals recruited into care roles are retained within the sector and successfully complete their apprenticeship programmes. In part, this reflects the very challenging post-pandemic period affecting the health and care sectors nationally, as well as the revised requirements of the recently reformed qualifications.

The provider works effectively to support learners with identified additional learning needs. Around 11% of learners have a recognised additional learning need, with over half of these having dyslexia. The provider has arrangements in place to recognise previously unidentified learning needs among its learners, enabling them to secure

the support, adaptations and assessment access that they need to be able to make good progress and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding. Specialist additional learning needs trained skills trainer-coaches provide valuable support to help these learners maximise their progress. They work with learners to identify their most effective ways of working and they compile monthly updates about their progress. These updates highlight any concerns and are used by the additional learning needs manager to track progress and identify trends.

Many trainer coaches usefully integrate ethical considerations, including equality, diversity and inclusion, at relevant points during learners' programmes. These are often considered in the context of learners' job-roles or wider current affairs. For example, discussions consider workplace practice with young children of different faiths and denominations. These activities reinforce the learning achieved via the interactive independent learning resources that support learners' personal development.

Educ8 has appropriate safeguarding and radicalisation policies and procedures in place together with suitable arrangements to check compliance across its sub-contractor partners.

The provider's safeguarding training sets out clear objectives and takes all staff through a series of meaningful activities. A small team of appropriately qualified and experienced staff members have designated safeguarding responsibilities.

Managers hold regular meetings with sub-contractors to discuss and monitor any safeguarding concerns.

Safeguarding awareness, both in terms of learner and workplace practice, is embedded into review and teaching sessions and most learners know how they should report a safeguarding concern.

Arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management

The senior leadership team have established a clear vision, mission and strategic direction for Educ8. This helps to ensure that the needs of employers and learners are being met and supports the delivery of its Welsh Government apprenticeship contract in the priority areas of health and social care, and environmental and sustainable developments. This is well communicated and understood by staff and stakeholders. The provider places 'people' at their centre, referring to learners, employers and their staff, and reinforces that, through collective working, success will be achieved. Strategic leaders have defined clear roles and responsibilities for themselves, middle leaders and all staff. The provider has established a clear reporting structure throughout all strands of the business.

The provider has a strong commitment to its staff, their value and well-being. Senior leaders prioritise a robust safeguarding and well-being culture across the provider and its partners.

The provider has developed a small and selective group of partners to work with to assist in the delivery of its contract. The provider selects its partners based on a number of key strategic decisions such as past performance, not duplicating existing provision and the delivery of niche provision. The provider also expects its partners to mirror the ethos and values of Educ8. The provider works effectively with its employers, communicating a wide range of information and keeping employers updated on key developments. The provider and its strategic partners support the delivery of Welsh Government priority sectors well. An example of this is the delivery of a large health and social care provision despite the pressures and challenges the sector has and is continuing to face. The operations leaders have clear responsibilities and targets relating to key aspects of their work. These targets are routinely monitored against a detailed range of key performance indicators.

Strategic planning is comprehensive and robust. The provider has a wide range of challenging targets that include critical success factors across departments. These key performance indicators and quality probes are designed to motivate staff and encourage improvements in quality and performance. Progress towards targets is monitored routinely using provider developed data dashboards focused on learner progress, framework attainment and Welsh language development.

Through completion of annual self-evaluation, staff at all levels have the opportunity to contribute to the overarching provider evaluation, reflecting on what is working well, and identifying opportunities for improvement. Partners are fully involved in self-evaluation and contribute to its development. Self-evaluation focuses well on learner outcomes and experiences and identifies clear areas and targets for development. Key information from the self-evaluation record is used to inform the quality development plan. This plan contains the main challenges for the provider along with useful targets dates for completion of developments.

The provider identifies its own and partners' underperformance and uses targeted action plans to address shortcomings. The frequency of monitoring is scaled according to the level of underperformance. The provider evaluates the impact of most quality improvement initiatives well. There are detailed quality monitoring processes across the partnership with robust systems to support partners' improvement where necessary. The provider makes good use of data and first-hand evidence in judging the quality of its and partners' provision. The provider links self-evaluation appropriately to its quality development strategies and initiatives. However, a minority of health and social care learners leave their programmes early and do not complete their apprenticeships.

The provider has a strong ethos of professional development with a key focus on the professionalisation of its trainer coaches. The provider has developed and established a well thought out model to support the professional learning of staff at all levels. Professional learning is wide ranging and provides staff with a range of opportunities to support their personal and professional development. This includes mandatory training in key topics such as safeguarding and health and safety as well as identifying individual needs through annual performance management and individual request. As a result of the support given by the provider, staff are well supported in their roles and to develop the skills to allow progression within the provider. The provider has helpful strategies to mentor staff to progress to more senior roles, which enables succession planning.

The provider has invested heavily in developing sector specific teaching and learning materials for nearly all learning areas. This effective digital platform is readily available to all staff and learners in the provider and its partners, if partner providers choose to use it. A specialist team project manages the development of materials in association with vocational specialist staff.

Evidence base of the report

Before the inspection, inspectors:

- analyse the outcomes from the learner and employer questionnaires and consider the views of teachers, trainers and assessors through their questionnaire responses

During the inspection, inspectors normally:

- meet the principal/chief executive, governors (where appropriate), senior and middle managers and individual teachers, trainers and assessors to evaluate the impact of the provider's work
- meet learners to discuss their work, to listen to them and to gain their views about various aspects of their provider
- visit a broad sample of sessions, including off-the-job, theory and practical training sessions
- visit a broad range of learners in their workplaces to observe their workplace skills, observe assessments, review their theory work and meet their employers
- look closely at the provider's self-evaluation processes
- consider the provider's quality improvement plan and looked at evidence to show how well the provider had taken forward planned improvements
- scrutinise a wide range of provider documents, including information on learner assessment, tracking and progress, records of meetings of managers and staff, meeting with sub-contractors and key partners and meetings with employers, information on learners' well-being, including the safeguarding of learners, and records of staff training and professional learning

After the on-site inspection and before the publication of the report, Estyn:

- review the findings of the inspection alongside the supporting evidence from the inspection team in order to validate, moderate and ensure the quality of the inspection

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the partnership and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

The report was produced in accordance with Section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of publication. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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