



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

ITEC Training Solutions Ltd

**ITEC House
Penarth Road
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by

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

About ITEC Training Solutions Ltd

Itec Training Solutions Ltd. is an employee-owned training provider that has been delivering work-based learning programmes in Wales for over 40 years. The transition from privately owned to employee owned took place in 2019. Based in the Cardiff area, the provider has apprentices across Wales in partnership with its subcontractors, Bethany Training Services Ltd., Coleg QS Ltd., CWBL, COPA (North Wales Training Ltd.), Pengwin Care Ltd., Urdd Gobaith Cymru Inc., XR Training, and Brightlink Learning Ltd.

As part of its Welsh Government funded apprenticeships provision, Itec and its subcontractor partners support around 3000 apprentices at around 700 employers. Many of the provider's apprentices work in the health and social care sector, but the partnership delivers apprenticeships from Level 2 to Level 5 across the following range of sectors:

- Business Administration and Law
- Construction, Planning, and the Built Environment
- Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
- Health, Public Services and Care
- Hospitality and Catering
- Information and Communication Technology
- Retailing and Customer Service
- Education and Training
- Leisure Management, Travel and Tourism

Summary

Many learners are enthusiastic about their apprenticeship programmes. They are competent, valued staff members at their respective employers. They are clear and confident when communicating with their assessors, employers and peers, and when answering questions about their work. However, in a few cases, the additional challenges faced by learners for whom English is not their first language, means that they struggle to engage. The provision and the associated teaching are not always effective in catering for these learners.

Many learners are keen to complete their apprenticeship programmes. They have clear short-term learning goals but around half of learners do not take enough ownership of their learning. They rely too much on their assessors to direct their learning in detail, and assessors too readily offer to write or type on behalf of their learners following their discussions. In a minority of instances learners do not regularly attend scheduled meetings with their assessors and tutors, or they cancel them with little notice.

Many of the provider's apprentices are in the health and social care sector. Over the past two years, the proportion of learners working in health and social care settings who successfully completed their apprenticeship frameworks has been low. Overall, around half of all learners take longer than expected to complete their apprenticeship frameworks.

Nearly all assessors are supportive of their learners and most make regular, sensitive checks on learners' well-being. Most learners and employers are confident that they can seek help from assessors with any well-being or personal issues. In one-to-one sessions, most learners listen attentively to their assessors and engage confidently in discussions.

Many learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, assessors do not routinely plan activities to explore the topic sufficiently and extend learners' understanding.

Assessors make good use of specialist professional learning to develop learners' resilience and to support them with additional learning needs such as dyslexia. Overall, the provider takes good account of learners' additional learning needs and ensures that suitable support is provided. However, in a few cases, the provider does not identify learners' additional needs early enough to allow appropriate support to be put in place.

Many assessors have recent occupational experience and use this effectively to help their learners develop valuable skills and knowledge related to their job roles. Many assessors plan effective learning activities with clear aims and set learners purposeful short-term targets. They skilfully use verbal questioning to develop learners' understanding. Many assessors provide learners with valuable verbal or written feedback that lets them know what they have done well and how they can improve. In a minority of cases written feedback on learner work is too generic.

A minority of assessors skilfully take advantage of opportunities to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills in the context of their vocational training. Around half of assessors purposefully promote the use of Welsh by apprentices in their work settings. However, overall, too few learners benefit from focussed learning of literacy and numeracy skills as part of their apprenticeship frameworks.

Too few employers in social care settings provide their apprentices with enough support. Few employers regularly meet with the assessor and apprentice to review progress and plan future learning and, in too many cases, employers do not provide their apprentices with enough time during their working hours to meet with assessors.

Overall, learners are satisfied with the support they receive from the assessors they currently work with. However, too many learners have suffered significant gaps or changes in assessor support, particularly in the health and social care sector. Senior leaders recognise this as being a consequence of the unusually high number of assessors leaving the provider over recent years and the challenges in recruiting replacements. They have worked effectively to change and to develop a team of assessors who are committed to their roles. These changes have begun to contribute to an improvement in the proportion of Itec's own learners who successfully complete their apprenticeships in social care settings.

Senior leaders are transparent about shortcomings in their provision and clear about the need to improve. They are committed to working to maintain health and social care provision in Wales despite the unprecedented period of challenge this sector has faced since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The effectiveness of management, quality assurance arrangements and collaborative working with apprenticeship subcontractors have been too inconsistent. Overall, leaders use the areas for improvement identified through candid self-evaluation appropriately to drive their improvement work. However, the provider's arrangements for evaluating and improving teaching, learning and assessment across its apprenticeship provision remain underdeveloped.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which learners achieve their apprenticeships and reduce the number of late completers
- R2 Ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are consistently available, planned and delivered well to support individual learners' progress, including in their literacy and numeracy skills
- R3 Ensure all employers meet their obligations to support the training of their apprentices
- R4 Ensure effective and rigorous quality and oversight arrangements identify and address risks early and drive improvements in a timely way

What happens next

The provider will draw up an action plan which shows how it is going to address the recommendations. Estyn will review the provider's progress.

Main findings

Learning

Many learners are enthusiastic and keen to complete their apprenticeship programmes. They are aware of their short-term learning goals and know what they need to do before their next progress review. However, around half of learners do not take enough ownership of their learning, they rely too much on their assessors to plan their learning programmes and to set their targets for them. These learners are not sufficiently aware of their progress towards completing their apprenticeships.

Many learners demonstrate sound occupational competence in line with their programme level and, as a result, become valued staff members for their employers. For example, a catering learner has a thorough understanding of their role and responsibilities in a busy commercial kitchen and demonstrates effective knife skills when preparing dishes, cutting fruit to consistent size with speed.

Many learners are confident when answering questions about their work and when communicating with their assessors and peers. They use technical terminology competently and give clear examples of the work they undertake. Many learners recall prior learning accurately and describe articulately how they apply this learning in their job-roles. For example, a childcare learner uses their research on challenging behaviours to inform their practice at work.

In a minority of instances, learners do not attend scheduled meetings with their assessors and tutors, or they cancel them with little notice. For the majority of learners in care settings, their employer does not allow them sufficient time during working hours to meet with their assessor for off-the-job learning activities. These learners have to schedule appointments or workshops during their own personal time which contributes to their unreliable attendance at one-to-one meetings.

Most learners demonstrate effective speaking and listening skills. They interact confidently with their assessors in one-to-one sessions and with other learners in group sessions, including those delivered online. Most learners respond well to questioning and feedback, and are comfortable in seeking clarification about any issues of which they are unsure. However, in a few cases, the additional challenges faced by learners for whom English is not their first language, means that they are less engaged in group sessions, particularly where sessions are held remotely.

Many learners produce written work that is well presented and of at least an appropriate standard. They have developed effective skills for extracting information, organising and summarising key content, and can write suitably at length when describing and explaining their work. In the best cases, learners express how much

their written work has improved during their training. For example, a health and social care apprentice describes insightfully the progress they have made between their first written reflective log and their most recent.

Many learners are unclear about what they need to do to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. Many health and social care learners chose not to undertake relevant essential skills qualifications when apprenticeship framework rules were temporarily relaxed in response to the pandemic. These learners do not routinely develop their literacy and numeracy skills as part of their apprenticeship. In a few cases, learners work purposefully to develop literacy and numeracy skills at higher levels than required by their frameworks.

A majority of learners are developing valuable digital skills and in a few instances they do so from very low starting points. A mature leisure management learner who was initially anxious about the use of information and communication technology (ICT) can now use it competently and explain the benefits of digital approaches to aspects of their work. Many learners use digital technology appropriately to navigate learning platforms and electronic portfolios where these are being used. However, a majority of learners report ongoing technical difficulties with logging into or using their e-portfolio system.

Many learners show positive attitudes towards developing their Welsh language skills, particularly through undertaking Prentis-laith modules. They recognise the value this can add in their personal lives as well as in their job roles. They see the benefits that their use of Welsh can bring to call centre customers, care home residents and children in nursery settings. A very few learners are fluent Welsh speakers. Very few of these learners undertake any written assessments bilingually or through the medium of Welsh.

Around half of all learners take longer than expected to complete their apprenticeship frameworks. Within the care sector, too often, learners' progress has been hindered by gaps in assessor availability. Where this is the case, learners have been left without meaningful contact from an assessor for extended periods and, as a result, make slower progress than they otherwise could.

Many of the provider's apprentices are in the health, public services and care sector. In 2021-2022, apprentices in that sector across the provider achieved their frameworks at rates substantially below the sector averages across all levels. In 2022-2023, the provider's health, public services and care framework attainment rates for foundation apprenticeships and level 3 apprenticeships improved to be slightly below sector averages. Framework attainment rates varied considerably across the provider and its subcontractors. For the provider's directly delivered apprentices, attainment rates for foundation apprenticeships and level 3 apprenticeships remained substantially below the corresponding national averages. Higher apprenticeship outcomes across the partnership for the health, public services and care sector remained significantly below sector averages.

Well-being, support and guidance

Assessors provide their learners with effective personal support and, as a result, many learners improve their self-confidence and self-esteem during their time as

apprentices. Nearly all assessors are supportive of their learners and successfully maintain friendly and productive working relationships with them. Most assessors make regular checks on learners' well-being and are sensitive in the way they give learners opportunities to communicate any personal issues that may be affecting them.

In observations and progress reviews, most learners conduct themselves professionally and many play an active role in discussions. They listen attentively to their assessors and are confident to fully engage in discussions to share their experiences and ask questions. A majority of learners are aware of their own characteristics, strengths, weaknesses and preferred ways of working. Most learners and employers are confident that they can seek the help of assessors should any well-being or personal challenges become an issue. Many assessors discuss equality, diversity and inclusion with learners and in the best cases they contextualise these to each sector and workplace. However, a few assessors lead these discussions at a superficial level and, as a result, learners are not fully engaged and do not see how the topic is relevant to them or their work. Assessors have accessed a beneficial range of specialist professional learning to develop their skills and knowledge in key identified areas such as, preventing burn-out with self-care, resilience and dyslexia awareness. This enables them to help their learners to manage the pressures of work and to identify and engage productively with strategies to address additional learning needs.

The provider delivers useful initial advice and guidance to potential learners and their employers before they sign up to an apprenticeship programme. The provider's induction programme addresses the main requirements and gives learners key information about their programmes. However, until recently induction was too superficial, and learners do not routinely remember key information later in their training. The provider's induction arrangements have recently been strengthened to make sure learners and employers have a clearer understanding of the requirements and demands of apprenticeship training. The provider does not engage all employers sufficiently during the apprenticeship programme and, as a result, not all learners benefit from ongoing support and constructive feedback from employers about their performance.

The provider takes good account of learners' additional learning needs and ensures that appropriate support is provided. They have clear plans for the development of strategies to support learners' additional learning needs. In the best cases, learners disclose additional learning needs to their assessors and are well supported, with their individual needs planned for and met. In a few cases, the provider does not identify learners' additional needs early enough to allow appropriate support to be put in place. The provider is rolling out targeted professional learning to improve the way that assessors work with learners to identify and disclose any additional learning needs that they may have. However, it is too early for these improved practices to be used consistently by all assessors and for their impacts to be gauged.

The provider and its sub-contractors implement suitable policies and procedures to safeguard their learners and staff members. They maintain appropriate records of staff Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and make sure staff members are registered with the Education Workforce Council where relevant. Most learners know how they should report any safeguarding concerns they may have. The provider has

developed beneficial links with a wide range of local external services and community groups to support and train staff, or to directly support learners.

Safeguarding leads use a comprehensive online system to record and monitor safeguarding concerns that are raised with Itec Training and its sub-contractors. The provider is clear on the number and type of concerns they receive and have appropriate processes in place to review the progress made to address individual concerns. The provider's arrangements for safeguarding learners meet requirements and give no cause for concern.

Nearly all staff have taken part in recent update training on safeguarding, including radicalisation and extremism. Many learners understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. However, the majority of assessors do not routinely plan activities to explore the topic and extend learners' understanding during progress reviews. To strengthen this aspect, the provider has recently begun to use improved resources and learning materials.

Teaching, training, assessment and learning experiences

The provision on offer reflects the provider's strategic emphasis on sectors identified as national and regional priorities. Many of the provider's apprentices work in the health and social care sector, with a few employed in the business, administration, and law sector. The provider also delivers apprenticeships to a few learners across education and training, leisure, travel and tourism, customer service, hospitality and catering, construction and engineering. The recent introduction of apprenticeship provision in legal services is helping to address a gap identified at national level.

The provider delivers suitable, flexible programmes, including hybrid delivery, to accommodate employer and learner needs. This allows for valuable remote and in-person interaction between assessors and learners. However, on too many occasions, technical issues hinder the overall effectiveness of remote sessions, with learners experiencing difficulties joining remote sessions and logging into the e-portfolio platforms, as well as wider connectivity problems.

Many assessors have recent occupational experience and use this effectively to help their learners develop valuable skills and knowledge related to their job roles. At the time of the inspection, a minority of assessors were recently new to the assessor role and were working to achieve recognised assessor qualifications.

Nearly all assessors establish a friendly and encouraging rapport and build effective working relationships with their learners. This has a positive impact on the progress that these learners make. Many assessors use a broad range of resources and refer learners to useful external sources of information that they use to inform their work. In the best cases, this deepens learners' understanding how theories are linked to practice.

Assessors work well with individual learners to identify the units of study that are best suited to their work contexts and aspirations. However, too few employers engage sufficiently as part of learners' overall apprenticeship programmes. Very few employers meet regularly with assessor and learner to review progress and plan future learning activities.

Many assessors plan effective learning activities that meet the needs of their learners. They are clear on the aims and purposes of sessions and communicate these effectively to learners. However, provision planning and learning activities are not always effective in catering for learners who do not have English as a first language.

Many assessors set clear targets so that learners are aware of the next steps in their learning. A few assessors set insightful, challenging targets that stretch individual learners. However, targets tend to be short-term and are not always challenging enough to support good progress over time.

Nearly all assessors successfully help learners to link their learning to their job roles. Many assessors use verbal questioning well to check, develop and enhance learning to deepen learners' understanding. In a few cases, assessors use effective probing questions to stretch and challenge more able learners to reach their potential.

Most assessors provide learners with regular, useful verbal feedback that helps them to address gaps in knowledge and understand which aspects they need to revisit. The majority of assessors also provide valuable, developmental written feedback on learner work. In a minority of cases written feedback on learner work is too generic and lacks detail.

Around half of assessors purposefully promote the use of Welsh by apprentices in their work settings. For example, health and social care assessors challenge learners to consider carefully how an active Welsh language offer can benefit their service users, residents and patients. Learners respond by describing how they have developed Welsh language signage and menus and how they use Welsh words when conversing with elderly service users, as well as taking care to sit Welsh speakers next to each other in care settings. However, overall, too few assessors successfully encourage learners to develop their Welsh language skills.

Most apprentices undertaking essential skills qualifications in literacy, numeracy or digital literacy receive appropriate induction and access to up-skilling sessions at the start of their programmes. In a few cases, dedicated essential skills sessions are planned and delivered particularly effectively. In these sessions, assessors use diagnostic assessment results well to target specific areas for development. A minority of assessors skilfully take advantage of opportunities to develop learners' literacy and numeracy skills in the context of their vocational training. For example, assessors use daily social care tasks such as measuring urine outputs and calculating fluid balances to develop learners' numeracy skills in these settings. However, overall, too few learners benefit from focussed learning on literacy and numeracy skills as part of their apprenticeship frameworks.

In a few sessions assessors do not provide enough time and opportunities for learners to practice their writing skills when reflecting on their work practice. These assessors too readily offer to write things for their learners during and following discussions. Although this speeds-up the sessions, it hinders personal development and learners do not become sufficiently independent in their learning.

In a few review sessions, assessors emphasise wider themes beyond the vocational learning. These sessions cover themes such as Welsh language and culture,

equality, diversity and inclusion. However, assessors tend to lead these sessions in a didactic way rather than encouraging discussion or using naturally occurring examples to extend understanding.

Most learners are satisfied with the commitment, support and guidance they receive from the assessors allocated to them. However, as a result of gaps in assessor support during their programmes, particularly for those in the health and social care sector, many learners do not achieve their apprenticeship frameworks within the planned timeframes.

Leadership and management

Senior leaders are committed to Itec Training's longstanding vision to be an innovative training provider and trusted partner of its stakeholders. Following the strategic decision to transfer full ownership of the company to employees in 2019, this vision was endorsed by the workforce and continues to underpin the ethos of the provider.

Leaders have remained committed to training and supporting health and social care apprentices and employers throughout the unprecedented period of challenge this sector has faced across the UK in recent years. The provider's priority is to help address the critical need to sustain the health and social care workforce, and many of the provider's apprentices work in care settings. Senior leaders are aware of the particular pressures that apprentices in these sectors are under.

Senior leaders fully and transparently recognise the need to improve practice both internally, and amongst care employers, to increase the proportion of their health and social care learners who successfully complete their apprenticeship frameworks. In too many cases, employers in the social care sector do not provide their apprentices with sufficient time during their working hours to meet with assessors. The high proportion of apprentices employed in this sector means that this challenge is particularly acute for this provider. The provider's leaders and managers do not do enough to challenge employers about this issue.

Senior leaders carefully target specific opportunities to expand their apprenticeship offer. For example, in 2023 they collaborated with a specialist training provider to offer recently launched legal services apprenticeships in south-east Wales that provide a new route into, and career progression within, the legal profession.

Leaders are working to develop collaboration and improve the way that subcontractor partners feed into, and influence, the provider's work. 'Partner days' give leaders from across the eight subcontractors an opportunity to shape important processes. Recent partner days have influenced improvements in the arrangements for the evaluation of teaching and learning across the partnership, as well as strategies for the development of apprentices' Welsh language skills. However, consultation with subcontractor partners and their involvement in the provider's strategic decisions, have been weak in recent years.

In response to high staff turnover among Itec's health and care assessors between 2020-2022, the senior leadership team has since worked effectively to develop a team of assessors who are committed to their roles. The provider has successfully

recruited experienced vocational practitioners from the sector and has put in place a valuable programme of training and development. This is enabling those new to the assessor role to become effective at supporting, as well as teaching and assessing, their apprentices. These changes have begun to contribute to an improvement in the proportion of the provider's own learners who successfully complete their apprenticeships.

However, in too many instances over recent years, the provider has not been able to provide its learners in the care sector with consistent assessor support. Apprentices have either had extended periods without assessor support or had multiple changes in assessor. This contributed to apprentices disengaging with their learning and not completing their apprenticeships within the expected timeframes.

Senior leaders have recently bolstered management capacity to oversee the quality of apprenticeship provision, including by recruitment into, and restructuring of, the provider's quality team in 2022-2023. In further recognition of the pressing need to improve, senior leaders also restructured the apprenticeships management team during this period. However, the effectiveness of management and quality assurance arrangements for apprenticeship provision have been too inconsistent. The work of new teams to drive improvement across the provision, both among subcontractors and internally, is at an early stage.

The provider's self-evaluation analyses a suitable range of outcomes measures and provides a candid reflection on what needs to improve as well as what is working well. However, a few important areas for development are not clearly identified by the provider, including the commitment of social care employers to fully support their learners. The provider's arrangements for evaluating teaching, learning and assessment across its apprenticeship provision, and that of its subcontractors, are underdeveloped.

Leaders use the key strengths and areas for improvement identified through self-evaluation appropriately to inform their quality improvement work. Improvement actions are suitably assigned, and leaders monitor progress and gauge the impact of these appropriately on a quarterly basis. However, implementation timescales for improvement actions are not always realistic and a few key development needs, such as arrangements to capture the views of employers, are not addressed.

The findings of the provider's self-evaluation are shared with subcontractor partners, but partners make limited contribution to its development. Subcontractor partners are not clear on the specific strengths and weakness across the partnership. The provider has recognised this and is working with subcontractor partners to strengthen their involvement.

Leaders' work to develop the provider's professional learning arrangements has focussed well on the training needs of those new to the assessor role. A comprehensive series of useful activities support new assessors beyond the achievement of the assessor qualification. The work to adapt and use similar arrangements to further the professional learning of experienced staff members is at an early stage.

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 going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

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