



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales



A report on

**ISA Training
Ground Floor
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Pencoed
Bridgend
CF35 5LJ**

Date of inspection: November 2010

by

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

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

Judgement	What the judgement means
Excellent	Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice
Good	Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement
Adequate	Strengths outweigh areas for improvement
Unsatisfactory	Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths

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

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Context

ISA Training (ISA) was established in 1998 as a privately owned work-based learning provider. ISA Training specialises in the delivery of Hairdressing and Beauty training. It delivers work-based learning programmes throughout Wales and South West England. In Wales, by the Welsh Assembly Government Department of Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills and in England by the Skills Funding Agency and Young People's Learning Agency.

In 2009, the employment rate in Bridgend was 66.2%. This was the eleventh lowest amongst the 22 Welsh local authorities. In 2005, the employment rate moved from being above the Welsh average to below it, where it has remained since.

ISA deliver Foundation Modern Apprenticeships (FMA), Modern Apprenticeships (MA), Pre-Apprenticeships, Skillbuild and Flexible Funded Learning. ISA also deliver 14-19 Learning Pathway programmes in Wales and Young Apprenticeship programmes in England.

At the time of the inspection, there were 504 learners in training. Learners follow the FMA, MA Skillbuild and Pre-Apprentice programmes in hairdressing, beauty, business administration, team leading, customer service and essential skills. All learners are employed by national and local companies across Wales and Gloucestershire.

Estyn inspected the provider in 2005 and re-inspected in 2006. Since that time, there has been a restructure of the senior management team and other staff roles. As a result, the provider has a more transparent management style, better team working, improved staff morale and significantly improved attainment rates across all programmes.

Summary

The provider's current performance	Good
The provider's prospects for improvement	Good

Current performance

Overall, the rates at which learners achieve their framework and other qualifications are good, with an upward trend over the last three years. Learners' success rates are good with Foundation Modern Apprentices performing slightly better than Modern Apprentices.

Almost all learners we talked to are highly motivated and ambitious, and take pride and professionalism in their work.

The re-structure in 2009 has resulted in a clear strategic direction for the company. Management and staff have good morale, work together well in teams and have a strong focus on increasing learners' attainment and striving for excellence.

Prospects for improvement

The prospects for improvement are good because:

- the provider has made good progress in implementing the recommendations from the last inspection;
- senior managers and staff work well together as an effective team and have a clear succession plan for the future;
- staff work professionally and are clear about their roles and responsibilities;
- the quality of training and assessment is good;
- the rates at which learners achieve their qualifications are good; and
- leadership and management are good.

Recommendations

- R1 Continue to improve attainment rates on all programmes;
- R2 make sure that all learners gain their qualification within given timescales, particularly 16 to 19 learners;
- R3 improve the observation of teaching and learning to provide a clear judgement of the quality and share teaching best practice with training consultants; and
- R4 maintain and develop the existing partnership working and collaboration.

What happens next?

Estyn requires the recommendations from the inspection to be addressed in the provider's improvement plan to DCELLs as part of the regular improvement planning cycle.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Good

Standards: Good

Overall, the rates at which learners gain their qualifications in Wales and England are good. Since the last inspection, learners' attainment rates on all programmes have improved significantly.

The provider's unverified data for 2009-2010 shows that learners' success rates have improved across all programmes and learning areas. Learners following the Foundation Modern Apprenticeship programme perform slightly better than those on the Modern Apprenticeship programme. Of the learners following the pre-apprenticeship programme, 45 left the programme and 31 achieved their qualification. Although the times in which a few learners attain their framework are slightly below the sector norm in Wales, they are well above the sector norm in England.

The majority of learners make good progress in their work placements and at off-the-job training sessions. In hairdressing, beauty, customer service and business administration, learners gain valuable skills and knowledge to enhance their training and employment opportunities. Almost all learners gain very good practical skills, and have a good understanding of the principles and concepts of hairdressing. All learners interviewed were highly motivated, ambitious and confident in their work.

Overall, the standard of learners' written work in NVQ portfolios is very good. Learners' practical work is good, particularly in the use of colour combination where learners are working at a level above that required by the qualification. Some learners were completing haircuts using techniques which were more than those required for the qualification. Learners generally had a good understanding of safe working practices, particularly in the use of colour. All learners understand their learning programmes and gain personal and professional confidence as they progress through their training.

Learners generally make appropriate progress in developing their essential skills. A few learners are working towards higher levels of key skills. Learners undertake an initial assessment before they start on the programme. During initial assessment learners are given the opportunity to undertake essential skills through the medium of Welsh. Basic Skills are assessed using BKSB on-line for literacy and numeracy. Training staff complete assessments at the start and end of the learners' training programme. The provider monitors the distance learners have travelled and addresses any support needs very well. Of the 36% of learners identified with Basic Skills needs, almost 50% have been able to access support.

The provider has started to deliver key skills at a level above that required for the qualification framework. Twenty-one per cent of learners are working towards higher level key skills and a few have these qualifications achieved to date.

The provider is developing a number of initiatives to promote and improve learners' bilingual learning. Four members of delivery staff and the sub-contractor staff are fluent Welsh speakers and deliver programmes through the medium of Welsh when required.

Wellbeing: Good

Learners feel safe and confident in their training and learning environments. Training consultants, employers and learners pay good attention to health and safety in the workplace.

Learners participate in training sessions well and develop a good relationship of mutual respect with their tutor or assessor. Standards of behaviour are good with learners fully engaged with their learning. Learners take part in charity events within the community such as fundraising and supporting those with serious illnesses. Community events are promoted to learners and employers well through the quarterly newsletter 'Hot Gossip' and by training consultants.

Learners feel safe and have a clear understanding of the complaints procedure. Learners have a good understanding of keeping safe and can make informed choices about healthy living.

Learners have a contact number that they can use if they feel they need assistance with anything that may concern them, including personal issues.

Learners have a range of opportunities to provide feedback on their training experiences and to influence and inform changes to the provision.

Key Question 2: How good is provision?	Good
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Learning experiences: Good

The provider meets the needs of learners, employers and the community well. ISA offers a range of programmes primarily to support the training and development of learners in the hairdressing and beauty industry. The provider develops and establishes effective working relationships with employers to provide learners with appropriate training. Skillbuild learners are given suitable work placements to develop useful employment skills and to test out their vocational choices.

The provider makes good provision for the assessment, training and development of learners' essential skills. Learners benefit from a well-organised programme of off-the-job training days at a range of accessible venues and good quality on-the-job training. Essential skills training and support are included in the training days programme, as well as welfare sessions and thematic work to promote learners' understanding of topical issues such as recycling and sustainability.

The provider introduced the Oyster Project in 2009. This project is designed to enrich and extend learners' experiences, for example through a learner exchange programme where learners spend time working in a different salon within Wales or England. Further development of these experiences will offer learners the

opportunity to work in salons in Europe and America. This not only helps learners to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem, but also to develop both personally and professionally. The project also offers learners a range of opportunities to extend their experience of specialist work, for example wig making and theatrical make-up.

The provider gives learners the opportunity to develop a wide range of appropriate skills and qualifications. Many learners take up the opportunity to achieve, for example, wider key skills and additional NVQ units. In addition, the provider hosts an annual hairdressing event in Cardiff, Salon Cymru, where learners are able to observe master classes by celebrity hairdressers and also to showcase their skills and compete against learners from across Wales.

The provider offers appropriate opportunities for learners to maintain and develop their Welsh language skills. These opportunities are promoted at the start of learners' programmes, during induction and throughout their time in training. Training consultants promote the development of simple conversational Welsh with learners by encouraging them to learn a Welsh phrase each month to use in work. The provider has established a project team which is effective in supporting the implementation of the company's Welsh language strategy.

ISA promotes education for sustainable development and global citizenship well. A resource group has developed a range of useful material to increase learners' awareness of important issues, for example Fair-trade, citizenship and climate change. These resources provide learners with a valuable introduction to these topics which are promoted each month by training consultants and include useful references and websites for learners to use to extend and further develop their understanding of ESDGC.

Teaching: Good

Overall, teaching and assessment are good. Training consultants deliver well-planned learning sessions which engage learners and provide sufficient challenge to ensure learners' progress. Training consultants are well-informed about individual learners' learning styles and use a variety of teaching strategies to meet their needs. The standard of learning resources to support learning is good. Lesson plans show clear links between practical activities, theory, vocational work and essential skills. Training consultants agree challenging targets with learners, which in the majority of cases are sufficiently demanding to ensure that learners consistently meet the high expectations set for them.

Assessment is well-planned, structured and thorough. Feedback is informative and leaves the learner knowing exactly what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Training consultants use detailed monthly action plans to set short term targets for learners between reviews. A red, amber, green (RAG) system is used effectively on the action plan to monitor the progress of individual learners. Training consultants keep detailed records of learner achievements. Employers participate well at learner reviews and are well-informed about progress learners are making.

Training consultants have good current commercial experience and technical knowledge which they use well to illustrate key learning points in an industrial context. Training consultants and learning support staff work well together to meet the development needs of learners, particularly when improving literacy and numeracy skills.

Training consultants provide high levels of individual support to learners and establish effective working relationships with employers creating a good learning environment.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provider promotes the health and wellbeing of learners well. It provides learners with clear, useful information about the help and support available to them from company staff and external agencies at the start of their programme. All learners have a well-presented bookmark of information in their portfolios outlining key contacts and agencies offering advice, guidance and support. This information is discussed with learners and reinforced regularly by training consultants in reviews. Training days delivered by the provider often include welfare sessions to increase learners' awareness of health and care related topics, such as alcohol and drug misuse, smoking and sexual health.

The provider has an appropriate policy and procedures in place for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. All staff receive appropriate training to promote their understanding of the provider's safeguarding arrangements. All learners are made aware of the provider's safeguarding policy and procedures when they start their learning programmes. The provider has a learner support officer who has a qualification in advice and guidance.

The provider has appropriate arrangements in place for monitoring health and safety within its centres and employers' premises.

The provider has two experienced essential skills staff. Learners benefit from the support these staff provide in developing their literacy, numeracy and life skills. Essential skills staff also support the development of learners' speaking and listening skills which are particularly important in the hairdressing, beauty therapy and customer service industries. Overall, the provider supports learners with additional learning needs well.

Learning environment: Good

In the sessions observed, a strong and positive attitude to learning is maintained. In all cases, the employers present a professional approach particularly in relation to dealing with customers. Training consultants continually reinforce a learning environment that encourages and challenges learners to do the best that they can. Learners are made aware, throughout their programme, of the provider's policies relating to respecting and celebrating diversity.

Overall, the physical environment for learning and delivery of learning and training is good. The main office accommodation and areas for learners are very good, modern

and well-equipped. This provides a stimulating environment for teaching, training and assessment. The environment for learning in the work place is generally good, with quiet areas within the salon for discussion between the learner and training consultant. All salons provide a good, realistic and commercial experience for all learners. Work placements are clean and well-maintained. In one hairdressing salon, music could have become a distraction to the learning session due to its volume, but the training consultant diplomatically dealt with this.

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?	Good
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Leadership: Good

The Managing Director and senior managers have a clear vision for the direction of the company. They have clear aims, strategic objectives and plans that are focused on improving the performance of the company, raising standards and the wellbeing of learners.

A re-organisation of the company in 2009 has established a greater transparency in roles and responsibilities, improved staff moral, given them a greater sense of ownership and had a significant impact on improving the quality and standards of the organisation.

All staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities and how they impact on the successful operation of the organisation. Corporate days are used well to disseminate information on organisational performance and provide opportunities for staff training and team building activities.

A range of monthly team meetings, together with regular one-to-one meetings between staff and managers, provide good lines of communication throughout the organisation. Internal communication is supported well by an intranet site.

The organisation monitors the performance of its staff well. There is a robust staff appraisal system in place which also includes a 360° appraisal of all managers. Managers use outcomes of the appraisal process well to identify training and development needs of staff and the strategic needs of the organisation. The organisation has a well-developed succession plan in place to secure its future.

The organisation has played a key role in implementing a strategy to address the Welsh Assembly Government transformation agenda by working closely with the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW). The organisation works closely with the governing body for hair and beauty (HABIA) and is a key contributor to a number of 14-19 Networks working closely with schools.

Improving quality: Good

The provider's self assessment report (SAR), quality development plan (QDP) and the processes for self-assessment are good and fully embedded into all operational and strategic activities. The provider has delivered continual improvement for learners over the last three years.

The responsibility for quality is shared between the head of support services and the head of operations. This arrangement is clear to all staff. This ensures that the focus for all aspects of the business is on continual improvement. The provider listens to learners through timely surveys well, and has recently held its first learner conference. This follows the successful employer conference, which is a good feature of the provider's relationship with the salon owners. The learner conference helps to inform decision-making for future initiatives, such as Salon Cymru. Overall, feedback from learners and employer is very positive. The provider ensures that the feedback from all of their listening activities is analysed well and informs the actions contained within the QDP.

The head of support services and the head of operations work very closely together and are supported well by all staff to control quality and drive the provider forward for continuous improvement. The quality processes include a good management information system (MIS) that tracks learners' progress and achievement. Included in the MIS systems are records of internal verification monitoring visits, analysis of performance of learners and training consultants, and target setting. The provider uses its QDP well as a working document and it provides the focus for management meetings at all levels.

The information contained within the MIS is open to scrutiny by all staff. Senior managers use this facility very well to monitor the performance of their operations, including staff performance and the progress learners are making in achieving their agreed targets. The lead internal verifier and quality manager carries out observation of training consultants very well. However, there is not enough focus on sharing good practice in teaching between training consultants.

ISA Training has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection.

Partnership working: Good

The organisation has very strong and effective partnership arrangements with a wide range of partners. It collaborates well in a number of initiatives taking the lead, where appropriate, in developing joint working practices. For example, staff share a continuing professional development programme with the Hair and Beauty department of a local college. The organisation is actively involved in partnership working with 14-19 Learning Area Networks to address the Welsh Assembly Government transformation agenda. This involvement promotes the status of work-based learning well.

The provider has good working relationships with employers and uses these relationships well to provide learners with work experience opportunities for themselves and other training organisations. The organisation also works closely with a local training company to provide ISA learners and staff with the opportunity to follow level 4 qualifications in management. The organisation manages its sub-contractor well. The sub-contractor uses the parent organisation's systems and procedures to ensure consistency and to maintain quality.

The organisation uses an annual peer assessment process with other training providers effectively to improve performance and share best practice.

Resource management: Good

Managers and staff monitor learner outcome data well and use national benchmark data effectively to make judgements on performance and set realistic targets for improvement.

ISA has sufficient qualified staff to undertake the operation of the organisation. The provider deploys all staff effectively to make best use of their skills and time. Training consultants have sufficient resources to carry out their roles and responsibilities.

Staff have good opportunities to gain appropriate training and qualifications to help improve their performance and career prospects. The provider plans well for staff development and has a clear organisational staff development plan that identifies company objectives and methods of delivery to meet these objectives.

The organisation manages its resources well. It monitors and reviews the operation and appropriateness of hair and beauty salons annually. Failure to meet ISA standards and requirements results in removal of a salon from the training organisation's list of employers.

The standard of employer accommodation and resources is good and monitored effectively by the provider.

The organisation manages its finances well through regular financial performance meetings.

Overall, learner outcomes are good and the provider offers good value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner Satisfaction

Responses to learner questionnaires completed before the inspection show that most learners would recommend this training provider to other people. Training staff help learners to settle in during the first weeks of their training programme. Many learners who responded indicated that they enjoyed their learning.

Appendix 2

T0000001 : I-SA Assessment & Training Ltd

WBL Provision - Success Rates by Sector/Subject Area and Programme Type

	2007/08						2008/09					
	I-SA Assessment & Training Ltd			National Comparators			I-SA Assessment & Training Ltd			National Comparators		
	Attained Learning Activities	Terminated Learning Activities	Success Rate	Attained Learning Activities	Terminated Learning Activities	Success Rate	Attained Learning Activities	Terminated Learning Activities	Success Rate	Attained Learning Activities	Terminated Learning Activities	Success Rate
By Sector / Subject Area												
Health, Public Services and Care	.	.	.	12,145	17,650	69%	.	.	.	14,080	17,900	79%
Education and Training	.	.	.	2,125	2,530	84%	.	.	.	1,930	2,190	88%
Business, Administration and Law	70	105	66%	10,070	13,680	74%	85	90	93%	9,770	12,120	81%
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care	.	.	.	1,140	1,545	74%	.	.	.	360	505	71%
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies	.	.	.	9,575	12,715	75%	.	.	.	9,690	12,105	80%
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment	.	.	.	5,675	8,050	70%	.	.	.	6,785	8,750	78%
Information and Communication Technology	.	.	.	4,080	5,790	70%	.	.	.	4,620	6,070	76%
Retailing and Customer Service	35	50	69%	10,100	13,690	74%	90	105	86%	9,440	11,775	80%
Hair and Beauty	500	660	76%	2,060	2,910	71%	535	650	82%	2,140	2,690	80%
Hospitality and Catering	.	.	.	3,425	5,060	68%	.	.	.	2,485	3,420	73%
Leisure, Travel and Tourism	.	.	.	2,175	2,725	80%	.	.	.	1,910	2,285	84%
Arts, Media and Publishing	.	.	.	55	90	64%	.	.	.	10	10	100%
Unspecified Sector/Subject Area	10	10	100%	15,495	25,890	60%	50	55	89%	20,325	28,125	72%
Total	610	820	74%	78,115	112,325	70%	760	905	84%	83,540	107,940	77%
By Programme												
Foundation Modern Apprenticeships	405	540	75%	34,830	47,215	74%	485	595	81%	33,200	41,755	80%
Modern Apprenticeships	170	230	74%	20,130	27,750	73%	205	225	91%	21,110	26,460	80%
Modern Skills Diploma	15	25	65%	1,525	2,655	57%	0	0	100%	1,235	1,675	74%
Skill Build	20	25	77%	21,480	34,160	63%	20	25	83%	27,230	36,780	74%
Other WBL programme	.	.	.	155	545	28%	55	60	90%	770	1,270	61%
Total	610	820	74%	78,115	112,325	70%	760	905	84%	83,540	107,940	77%

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)

. denotes not applicable.

Numbers have been rounded to nearest multiple of 5.

Appendix 3

The inspection team

Sandra Barnard HMI	Reporting Inspector
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Bernard Hayward HMI	Team Inspector
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