

# THE PROVIDER INSIDER

INSIGHTS INTO FURTHER EDUCATION

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TALENTED TRAINING

This blog brings you an interview with Talented Training, an adult education budget training provider who deliver classroom based learning programmes for the unemployed. Interview with Marios Chrysostomou, Managing Director. <https://www.talentedtraining.co.uk/>

### HOW IS IT GOING?

All things considered we are doing ok, just trying to be positive during such an uncertain time. We are eternally grateful for all the key workers that are going above and beyond right now to protect us in the UK. We are also thankful that we are of a digital age where there are options available to us, helping us to continue working and supporting our learners, using various platforms, software and social media.

### AS AN AEB PROVIDER, WHO DELIVERS PREDOMINATELY IN THE CLASSROOM, ARE YOU CONTINUING WITH ANY OF YOUR PROGRAMMES?

Yes, Talented Training put a contingency plan in place 2 weeks ago should the COVID 19 develop as it has in other countries. The first point of action was to transfer our bespoke programmes on to an online platform and prepare all students currently on programme for the changeover. Because most of our courses have a practical element or qualification attached to the training, we have had to front load all the theory-based work and deliver the practical as soon as we can. We are in constant communication with Awarding Bodies to see what other methods of delivery we can use to overcome any issues that may arise from distance learning.

### HOW ARE YOU CONTINUING WITH LEARNING – WHAT APPROACHES / SOFTWARE ETC

With time being a factor and our programmes being bespoke we needed to use an established platform that has the ability to upload our programmes and have live video interaction with the students. For this we used a platform called Edlounge who have supported us in a short time frame. Taking a blended learning approach, we have also used other supporting apps and software such as WhatsApp, Zoom, good old-fashioned emails and phone calls to support learners. Leaders and staff use Microsoft Teams which is a great free app for video meetings and persistent workplace chat.

### HOW ARE YOUR LEARNERS & STAFF RESPONDING?

Both staff and learners now seem to be comfortable with the change of teaching and learning and we have put in place processes to give learners extra support. We knew initially that it wouldn't be all smooth sailing, nobody likes unexpected change, but we prepared staff and learners as much as we could. Training was given to staff on the platform with dummy classes to get them comfortable with using it. We assessed the students to find out which were IT confident, who had access to a device and internet at home and who didn't have anything to work off, this is where tutors have had to be creative with teaching and get around issues allowing continuity with delivery.

### ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT THE CLAWBACK IF THE T&L BEING OFFERED DOESN'T MEET AUDIT?

We are telling staff to keep as much evidence as they can, including progression made by learners to reflect the funding being drawn down. Individual learning plans, tutor contact logs with learners and reports from the system are some of the key documents we use to help evidence teaching and learning. The IQA's are diving into learners work through the platform and have an overview of delivery plans, the quality of delivery, monitoring and supporting of learners. We are also using a range of methods to look at the impact of what they have learnt. Although we understand that the DfE/EFSA have had a lot to consider we do feel that there has been little to no guidance or advice aimed at ITPs delivering Adult Education Budget, leaving many ITP's to their own devices trying to do their best at what they believe is right.



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## WILL YOU NEED TO USE FURLOUGH FOR STAFF? ANY CHALLENGES / WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES TAKING PLACE

During the lockdown we are aiming to keep all staff working from home but we do not know how long these arrangements will need to be in place for, at the present time, our expectation is that we plan to resume normal timetabled activity and working arrangements from after the Easter break, i.e. with effect from Monday 20th April onwards.

As with any business facing financial challenges, we may need to implement furlough at some point in the future should all other options be exhausted. The challenges we faced with remote working was mostly setting systems up to be able to continue business as usual, having in place equipment that would work and protect information remotely i.e GDPR and protecting learners details. There was also a need to invest in further laptops and phones for staff, which of course needed to be encrypted.

We are lucky to have most of our systems and software operating via the cloud allowing us to access them from anywhere. Most paperwork can be completed via a digital format so this makes life a little easier.

Well-being is especially important for staff working from home, we have put in place policies that encourage staff to take proper breaks and to have a healthy work/lifestyle balance. Also realising the importance of flexible working, we introduced policies that include guidelines for home workers. A daily video call is now part of our procedures, speaking to a member of staff helps promote team morale and give support whilst through isolation. We will also be emailing weekly videos to promote mindfulness, meditation, positive mantras and home exercise routines. To go alongside this we have decided to partner with a nutritionist who will be able to advise if required some healthy eating plans and nutritional guidance to support a healthy balanced lifestyle throughout the isolation period.

## WHAT ADDITIONAL SUPPORT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FOR ITP'S OR AEB?

Speaking from a provider that delivers currently in a non-devolved area and mostly for Job Centres, we would like to see some assurance and guidance taking place for the future of our sector from the DfE and ESFA.

There are a lot of private providers out there who have dedicated staff that make a difference to learner's lives within these provisions, they play an important part in giving them different forms of skills needed locally. If the DfE do not act quickly there will be a lot of good ITP's out of business. It's good to see that most if not all the MCA's have honoured payments to the devolved areas, the DfE need to take note.

## CAN YOU RE-START YOUR PROVISION EASILY WHEN ISOLATION PERIOD IS OVER – WHAT WILL BE THE KEY STRUGGLES?

With good communication with partners and stakeholders, I am confident that we can re-start our delivery provisions reasonably easily. The issues will lie if concerns are left unanswered with the Government departments, i.e how will our funding profile be affected? Will we still be subject to clawback? What are the implications of not meeting performance management points due to delivery being impacted? All points that need an urgent answer. Personally, I do not think Talented Training will go back 100% to the way we delivered pre isolation, we will adapt and take process's and models that work better and implement them in future delivery.

## ANY TIPS OR ADVICE FOR OTHER TRAINING ORGANISATIONS THAT ARE IMPLEMENTING DISTANCE LEARNING & WORKING FROM HOME METHODS?

Online and blended learning are key, there are so many apps, programmes and platforms available, many for free. You must be creative in your thinking and deliver in different formats (video, text, email, phone). From my experience learners will want to learn at their own pace, so be prepared for this but do try keep your achievements timely.

Be prepared and plan, organise your workspace at home and keep motivated, it can be hard having to work from a sofa or kitchen table if you do not have a home office. It's important to keep to a schedule as much as possible.

Trust between the managers and employees is vital for remote working to succeed. Managers should implement social and professional interaction, providing a sense of belonging to staff. There can be problems that arise from isolation, that need to be understood, which can include stress and mental ill-health. Be positive, be creative and work in collaboration when you can. Together we will get through this!

**Interview with Marios Chrysostomou , Managing Director  
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