

IMCA Diving Supervisor and ALST Training During the COVID-19 Pandemic

IMCA-approved Trainee Air Diving Supervisor (TADS), Trainee Bell Diving Supervisor (TBDS) and Assistant Life Support Technician (ALST) courses are currently delivered by DT2 Training Supplier Members in accordance with [IMCA D 013 – IMCA offshore diving supervisor and life support technician certification schemes](#). This Information Note has been drafted to provide guidance for training establishments intending to offer IMCA Diving Division approved courses during the COVID-19 outbreak utilising Online Distance Learning (ODL) methods.

The requirements of relevant national legislation with regards to COVID-19 will always take precedence over this guidance and must be complied with.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic began spreading globally in the spring and early summer of 2020. As a result, many countries introduced national lockdown restrictions, forcing most training providers teaching IMCA's Diving Division Supervisor and ALST courses to cease training.

Due to ongoing travel and other restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the IMCA Diving Division Management Committee (DDMC) has agreed to allow training providers the option to deliver IMCA Diving Division approved courses using ODL techniques. This will:

- ◆ assist training providers to continue to deliver IMCA Diving Division courses during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- ◆ allow for an uninterrupted supply of trained personnel to the diving industry.

The DDMC has not decided if ODL will be allowed to continue once the COVID-19 pandemic is over. A decision on this matter will be made in due course. Schools may wish to take this into consideration when deciding how best to design and deliver their programmes via the ODL format.

1. Online Distance Learning

ODL can be delivered in one of two ways:

- a) Through an online virtual classroom with the instructor delivering the lessons in a lecture type format via a suitable videoconferencing platform. This will not require prior IMCA approval providing there is no significant change to the course programme. However, consideration must be given to ensuring there are adequate student support arrangements in place as this method of delivery is significantly different to a normal classroom setting.
- b) Through an online distance learning programme using platforms such as Moodle etc. However, this delivery method, in conjunction with the school's student support arrangements, will require prior approval from IMCA before its introduction. Training providers wishing to use this method will be required to provide all their training materials and their revised course programmes, along with details of their student support arrangements, for approval. It is not possible to guarantee that candidates who undertake ODL training via training platforms are who they claim to be. Training providers should be aware of this and be alert to such things as noticeable changes in the quality of students' daily performance, written answers and test results.

Training providers teaching IMCA Diving Division approved courses may elect to deliver ODL using both methods.

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Issue date:

July 2020

Document reference(s):

Diving Division

IMCA D 22/20

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For the avoidance of doubt no legal liability shall attach to any guidance and/or recommendation and/or statement herein contained.*

Whichever method of ODL is chosen, it is essential that bandwidth and connectivity are such that online programmes are delivered effectively. While occasional minor glitches commonly associated with internet provider services may inevitably arise, the delivery of ODL courses cannot be seriously disrupted by IT shortcomings. Guidance should therefore be provided to candidates on the IT requirements necessary for reliable and effective participation in the programme. Candidates must ensure they have sufficient bandwidth to accommodate the method of training delivery prior to the commencement of the course. A number of devices are available on the market which can improve internet speed and reliability. There should not be any additional charges made by the training providers over and above the course fees to improve internet service, and this should be made clear to the candidate at registration. The software used to broadcast the lessons should be capable of running on a PC, Mac or tablet device.

2. IMCA Trainee Air Diving Supervisor and Trainee Bell Diving Supervisor Courses

To qualify as a trainee air diving supervisor, a candidate must have satisfactorily completed an IMCA-approved Trainee Air Diving Supervisor training course which meets the Terminal Objectives of the IMCA Offshore Diving Supervisor Certification Scheme set out in IMCA D 013, and have passed the course examination.

To qualify as a trainee bell diving supervisor, a candidate must have satisfactorily completed IMCA approved Trainee Air and Bell Diving Supervisor training courses which meet the Terminal Objectives of the IMCA Offshore Diving Supervisor Certification Scheme set out in IMCA D 013, and have passed the course examinations.

As the content of the IMCA Trainee Air Diving Supervisor and Trainee Bell Diving Supervisor courses is theoretical rather than practical, IMCA accepts it is possible for training providers to deliver these courses in full, and also stage the course examination(s), entirely online. During the pandemic, candidates seeking to qualify as trainee diving supervisors may attend and complete IMCA-approved online Trainee Diving Supervisor training courses.

However, although it will not be compulsory to do so, candidates also have the option of taking a blended learning approach. They may choose to do all of the theoretical training and school examination(s) online and then, when safe to do so in accordance with national legislation and local regulatory guidelines, elect to undertake two days of additional face-to-face training before taking the school course examination(s) for a second time.

Candidates who take the blended learning approach will:

- ◆ facilitate the process of identity verification for the schools (see item 4 below); and
- ◆ give themselves the opportunity to undertake face-to-face refresher training prior to sitting the actual IMCA Diving Supervisor examination(s).

Training providers report that Trainee Diving Supervisors who attend voluntary face-to-face revision sessions shortly before sitting the IMCA Diving Supervisor examinations markedly improve their chances of passing.

3. IMCA Assistant Life Support Technician (ALST) Course

The IMCA-approved face-to-face ALST course runs for a period of 60 hours over ten days. The course is a blend of theory and practical work. The Terminal Objectives for the theoretical parts of the course are set out in IMCA D 013, Section 15, parts a) to d). The Terminal Objectives for the practical parts of the course are set out in IMCA D 013, Section 15, part e).

Divers holding an IMCA-recognised closed bell diving qualification who completed diver training prior to 1 November 2006 can be appointed assistant LSTs by their employers. Closed bell divers who trained after 1 November 2006 must pass an IMCA-approved ALST training course examination before they can be appointed assistant LSTs.

All other individuals should satisfactorily complete an IMCA-approved ALST training course which includes at least the items set out in [IMCA D 013](#), Section 15 *Terminal Objectives for Assistant Life Support Technician Courses*, parts a) to d), and pass the course examination, before being sent offshore to gain experience. Prior to being appointed as an assistant LST offshore, such individuals must also have undertaken and recorded (under direct supervision) the elements of practical experience listed in [IMCA D 013](#), Section 15 *Terminal Objectives for Assistant Life Support*

Technician Courses, part e). The part e) practical elements may be undertaken at a training establishment equipped with the necessary facilities, or they may be completed offshore prior to appointment as an assistant LST.

IMCA accepts that it is possible for training providers to deliver the theoretical parts of an IMCA-approved Assistant Life Support Technician course, and also stage the course examination, online. During the pandemic, candidates seeking to complete the theoretical parts of an IMCA-approved ALST training course, and pass the course examination, before being sent offshore to gain experience, may attend and complete an IMCA-approved online Assistant Life Support Technician course.

However, such candidates cannot be appointed as assistant LSTs by their employing companies until the IMCA D 013, Section 15, part e) practical elements have been satisfactorily undertaken and recorded, either:

- ◆ at a training establishment equipped with the necessary facilities; or
- ◆ offshore while the candidate has been gaining experience under direct supervision.

The part e) practical elements must only be undertaken when it is safe to do so in accordance with national legislation and local regulatory guidelines.

Although it will not be compulsory to do so, candidates also have the option of taking a blended learning approach to the theoretical parts of the ALST course. They may choose to do all of the theoretical training and school examination online and then, when safe to do so in accordance with national legislation and local regulatory guidelines, elect to undertake two days of additional face-to-face training before taking the school course examination for a second time.

Candidates who take the blended learning approach will:

- ◆ facilitate the process of identity verification for the schools (see item 4 below); and
- ◆ give themselves the opportunity to undertake face-to-face refresher training prior to sitting the IMCA Life Support Technician (LST) examination.

Training providers report that ALSTs who attend voluntary face-to-face revision sessions shortly before sitting the IMCA LST examination markedly improve their chances of passing.

4. Verification of Identity Prior to Course Attendance

To be eligible to attend an IMCA-approved Diving Supervisor or ALST course (either online or face-to-face) all candidates must meet the pre-requisite minimum criteria as detailed in [IMCA D 013 IMCA offshore diving supervisor and life support technician certification schemes](#) (Sections 4.1 and 12.1). Training providers must have suitable arrangements in place to verify the identity, qualifications, and experience of each candidate.

When candidates attend IMCA Diving Division approved courses in person, to verify they are who they say they are, and to check they meet the course entry requirements, the students must provide training provider staff with the following pre-course documentation:

- ◆ photographic proof of identity, such as a valid passport, photographic driver's licence, or national identity card;
- ◆ original diver or diving supervisor certification; and
- ◆ original signed and stamped logbook(s).

For ODL courses, the opportunity for training establishment staff to undertake physical 'real-world' inspections of photographic ID, original logbooks, and original certificates is not available. Nor is it possible to meet candidates to facilitate the process of identity verification, other than on-screen. Nevertheless, training providers must ensure that they have robust alternative arrangements in place to verify the identity, qualifications, and experience of each ODL course candidate.

In the absence of physical real-world inspections of pre-course original documents, ODL course candidates should submit scanned copies of the pre-course documentation to the training provider prior to the commencement of the online course. The legitimacy of the scanned documents can then be checked via webcam, where candidates are visible to the instructors and can produce their original evidence in front of the camera. Further confirmation

of candidates' identities and previous experience can be obtained from senior managers of their current (or last) employers.

5. Teaching Staff

Teaching staff who deliver training on IMCA Diving Division approved courses in virtual classroom settings, or who are made available to deliver online support, must have been previously assessed and approved by IMCA as being suitably competent to deliver the required training in a normal classroom setting. Trainers who have not previously been assessed by IMCA must submit their CVs for approval prior to delivering training or offering online support.

6. Online support

Online student support is a critical element of ODL courses. Regardless of the method used for online delivery, training providers must ensure that there is suitable online support available throughout the programme for each candidate. Candidates must be able to obtain additional guidance outside of the allocated course delivery time. The distance learning support should come from an instructor who has been assessed by IMCA.

Regardless of how well a student appears to be progressing with the course, it is essential that **all** students are offered online support. Lack of face-to-face interaction while undertaking distance learning makes recognising a student who is struggling with aspects of the course a challenging issue. It should therefore be assumed that all candidates will face some difficulties, and all must be able to obtain assistance.

7. Course Duration

The times to complete IMCA-approved ODL Diving Supervisor and ALST courses may vary according to the method of delivery and student ability. However, it is essential that all the Terminal Objectives listed in IMCA D 013 are included in the courses and have been met by the candidates. The durations of the courses should be no less than the times specified in IMCA D 013. Where distance learning platforms are used, it is possible to disable access to lessons until the following day, or a later date, to avoid the course being completed in an unacceptably short time.

8. Virtual Classroom Settings

Virtual classrooms should be configured in essentially the same way as a normal classroom setting and delivery should be "live". This should include the ability for students to view a whiteboard, or whiteboard sharing device, for the demonstration of physics examples and other material, as well as the ability for the instructor to show and demonstrate training aids, such as regulators, different valve types, analysers etc.

100% attendance is required for all candidates undertaking ODL and they should be visible to the instructor via their camera at all times i.e. the candidates' cameras should always be switched on. It is strongly recommended that training breaks are taken every 1 hour as a minimum, allowing delegates to rest their eyes and move from a seated posture.

A typical example of a good quality virtual classroom setup is shown diagrammatically in Appendix 1, although other appropriate configurations may be used.

9. Face-to-Face Classroom Settings

Information Note IMCA D 21/20 *IMCA Diver Medic Training During COVID-19* contains guidance on the setting up of classrooms and other facilities to minimise the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission and infection. It also contains recommendations on COVID-19 pre-course screening of candidates. Where some or all of an IMCA-approved Diving Division course is undertaken in a classroom setting, the guidance on these matters contained in IMCA D 21/20 should be followed.

10. ODL Course Sizes

ODL course sizes should not exceed the maximum number of students permitted for conventional face-to-face IMCA Diving Division approved courses. When setting the maximum numbers of candidates on an IMCA-approved ODL course, training providers should consider the following:

- ◆ the level of online support that can be provided to the candidates;
- ◆ the ability for all students to participate and interact during the lessons;
- ◆ possible language barriers.

11. Examination

When it is not possible to sit the trainee diving supervisor or ALST exam at a school venue, training providers must ensure that they have sufficient measures in place to ensure that cheating cannot take place and that the security of the exam is not compromised. Known methods of cheating during online exams or recording of their content include:

- ◆ the use of mobile phone cameras;
- ◆ the use of micro cameras contained in pens and watches;
- ◆ the use of mobile phone messaging services;
- ◆ candidates speaking the words of questions to themselves and those words being recorded;
- ◆ the use of calculators where information can be stored and accessed;
- ◆ covert screen sharing with others; and
- ◆ the use of an impersonator to sit the examination.

Should any concerns about cheating or dishonest behaviour arise during an online course examination, the examination should be terminated immediately and the matter investigated.

12. Approval of Distance Learning Methods

The option to deliver online distance learning for IMCA Diving Supervisor and ALST courses during the COVID-19 pandemic is only available to those training establishments whose conventional classroom based face-to-face courses have been audited and approved by IMCA. Training providers seeking authorisation to deliver IMCA Diving Division approved courses using ODL techniques must provide IMCA with the following:

- ◆ details of the method of online delivery;
- ◆ a description of the school's verification processes;
- ◆ a description of the school's social distancing precautions, where applicable;
- ◆ details of the ways in which online support is offered to students; and
- ◆ details of the examination process.

Training providers must inform IMCA of when they intend to run their ODL courses. IMCA must be provided with suitable passwords and access details for each programme, and the Association reserves the right to attend any ODL course to monitor and assess the adequacy of the training provided.

When online distance learning platforms and courses have been evaluated and approved by IMCA, training providers may advertise their online IMCA Diving Division courses.

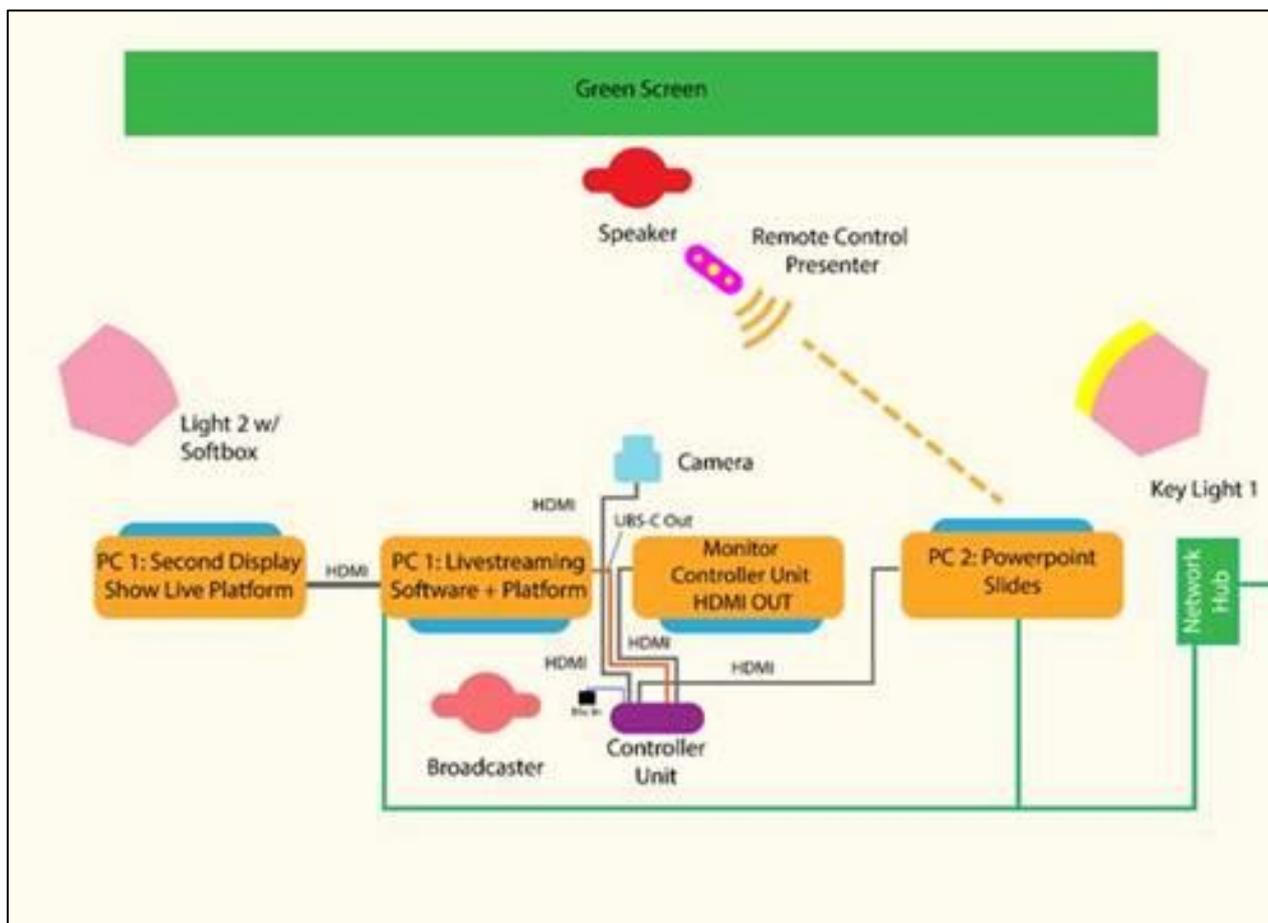
Upon successful completion of every ODL course, training providers must notify IMCA of the candidates' details (just as is required when conventional classroom based courses are successfully concluded), stating what portion of the training was conducted online.

13. Duration

This Information Note will be reviewed regularly. However, at present IMCA anticipates that it will remain in place until **01 July 2021**.

Virtual Classroom Example

A typical example of a good quality virtual classroom setup is shown below:



Typical facilities and equipment:

1. A suitable sized room, with no external lighting and ambient noise disturbance.
2. A minimum of two internet lines from different service providers (allowing for internet drop out and back up line).
3. 10 x 12 Feet Green Screen c/w 8.5 x 10 ft Green Screen Stand.
4. 2x Dimmable LED Lights + 1x Soft box (optional) to ensure the trainer is illuminated correctly during the training delivery.
5. 1x Wireless lapel Mic.
6. 2x Speakers (optional, if you want to amplify the sound in the conference).
7. 1x Spotlight Remote.
8. 1x Webcam.
9. OBS Software (other streaming software that supports Virtual Camera) + OBS Virtual Camera installation.
10. Suitable webcam software and control device to manage the screen and projections.

11. 1x PC desktop/Laptop setup for PowerPoint (Windows 10 at least + MS Office).
12. 1x PC desktop setup for broadcasting (Windows 10 at least, enable "Stereo Mix" in the recording devices).
13. 1x Monitor for Projector output.
14. 1x Monitor for Zoom platform output.
15. 1x Network hub (To connect multiple computers to the network via LAN cables).
16. Zoom software or any online virtual conferencing platform.
17. 1x USBC to USB A (3.0).
18. Connecting cables for Camera Output, HDMI input.
19. A means of recording the training.
20. A means to host questions and answers via the media being used so all participants can see the questions and related answers.
21. Each delegate will be required to have a copy of the course providers course workbook.

Note: Other appropriate facilities, equipment, and configurations may be used.