

Alder Training Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50376

Name of lead inspector: Maria Navarro HMI

Last day of inspection: 10 December 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Alder Training Limited
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Information about the provider

1. Alder Training Limited (Alder Training) is a privately owned training company. It currently contracts with the North West region of the Skills Funding Agency to offer apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Government funded training accounts for 90% of the training delivered. The company's main area of learning is health, public services and care. Alder Training also operates as a subcontractor to a local training provider called Sysco Training to deliver foundation learning programmes to young people. Sysco Training was inspected by Ofsted in 2008 and Alder Training was visited as part of that inspection. Since 2009, Alder Training has begun working in partnership with the Greater Merseyside Learning Providers Federation to deliver an accelerated programme led pathway. Alder Training has been a recognised Centre of Vocational Excellence, working in partnership with two local colleges for its provision in care and dental nursing since 2004.

2. Alder Training currently employs 56 staff. Four directors are supported by a number of senior managers and customer relationship officers. There are a further 28 assessors, four tutors, three internal verifiers and one learner support officer. Alder Training works with a large number of employers and it has three training centres in the Liverpool and Merseyside areas and a further five outreach centres. At the time of the inspection, there were 748 learners on programme. The majority of the learners were undertaking a qualification in health and care, while 28 learners were completing a customer service qualification within the health and care workplace. Over 540 of the learners were undertaking an apprenticeship programme and 206 were enrolled in a Train to Gain programme; of these, 42 were undertaking a Skills for Life qualification at foundation and intermediate levels.

3. Approximately 35% of learners have recognised additional learning needs. The majority of learners are female and have a White British background. Learners work in public and private health and care providers of varied sizes, such as NHS Trusts and dental practices in the Greater Merseyside area. The unemployment rate in this area is over 10%, compared with the national rate of 7.9%. According to the 2001 census, the minority ethnic representation in Liverpool is approximately 6% compared with 10% nationally.

4. Alder Training was last inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate in 2005. Alder Training achieved the Matrix and the Training Quality Standard awards in 2009.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	575 learners 744 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	2

Overall effectiveness

5. The majority of learners complete their programme well. Although in the last five years not all learners have achieved their qualifications within the expected time, this is now much improved and learners are progressing well. Learners develop good vocational skills, particularly in dental nursing programmes and they increase their confidence. They progress well through the different levels of qualifications and many have improved their economic prospects by being promoted in the workplace. Alder Training works hard to ensure that learners adhere to safe working practices and learners say that they feel safe.
6. Training and assessment are good at Alder Training. Assessors are very flexible and adapt quickly to the needs of learners and employers. They are very knowledgeable and experienced but they sometimes do not use sufficiently the full variety of assessment methods available to them. Alder Training has very good relationships with employers and works well with them to provide training that matches the needs of their health and care companies. Alder Training offers a wide range of qualifications and supports learners very well with their specific learning needs.
7. The management at Alder Training has very clear plans to continue developing its organisation. They are very good at monitoring the progress learners make and the quality of their training. They communicate well with employers and

their own staff and act quickly on the feedback they receive from employers and learners. They offer good value for money and safeguard their learners well. Alder Training promotes equality of opportunity and diversity to its staff, employers and learners particularly well.

Main findings

- Success rates are good overall. Since 2005, overall success rates have greatly increased on all programmes. Success rates are good for the apprenticeship programmes and satisfactory for the Train to Gain programmes. Timely success rates across all programmes are satisfactory. They were low but have greatly increased in the last five years. They are currently above the national average.
- Learners confidently develop good vocational skills in dental nursing and childcare in particular. All learners grow in self-confidence. Progression onto higher levels is good and many learners have enjoyed a job promotion in the workplace, thereby improving their economic well-being. Current learners are progressing well with their qualification.
- Teaching, training and assessment are good. Learners benefit from both highly effective individual coaching and group teaching, although information learning technology is not always used sufficiently well to enhance learning. Assessors use initial assessment well to inform learning programmes. The carefully planned, timely and flexible assessments, meet individuals' and employers' needs well.
- The good and extensive range of provision across all vocational areas meets learners' and the employers' business needs very well. Learners value particularly the opportunity to progress to further study and enhance their career prospects. The delivery of learning programmes is highly flexible and offers a very extensive choice of vocational subjects.
- External partners readily recognise the provider's valuable contribution and responsiveness. Communication with employers is particularly effective; their active involvement has helped improve the quality of provision. Although not all employers are sufficiently involved in programme development and training, they generally know how well learners are progressing.
- Care, guidance and support are good and help learners achieve their learning goals and progress to further qualifications. Staff help learners to overcome social and personal barriers to successful learning. Learners who experience slow progress with their qualifications, due to personal problems, benefit from additional time and support to help them progress and achieve.
- Alder Training has a well planned strategy to provide high quality provision in health and social care programmes to meet the needs of employers, those already in such employment and to provide progression routes for young people aspiring to enter these occupations. The provider has a very good understanding of local and national priorities for learning and employability.

- The operational management of the provision is good. Communications are particularly effective in ensuring that staff are aware of the current performance of the training provision and the areas that need rectifying. Frequent individual meetings measure staff performance particularly well, although the agreed targets during staff appraisals are not always sufficiently challenging.
- The provider is highly active in seeking the views of staff, learners and employers, and these views are used very effectively to inform their self-assessment process. However, the report does not identify the key strengths and areas for improvement. The links between the self-assessment report and the quality improvement plan are underdeveloped.
- Alder Training applies thorough quality assurance process to its provision and has a good understanding of its areas for development. Although managers use their information system regularly to inform improvement, some of its wider aspects are underdeveloped. The provider does not have an overall view of the progress and achievement made by all learners.
- Learners benefit from staff who are appropriately qualified and experienced and who have a good programme of continuous professional development. The provider ensures that learners can attend training in their local areas by renting high quality accommodation and training facilities. The provider monitors the programmes and their financial performance closely to provide good value for money.
- The provider places good emphasis on safeguarding its learners. Learners adhere to safe working practices and feel safe. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is good and the provider has improved outcomes for specific groups of learners. Although equality topics are explored with learners, what has been learnt is sometimes insufficiently recorded in the progress reviews.

What does Alder Training need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve timely success rates through further detailed analysis of management information and ensure that all targets are sufficiently ambitious and challenging to contribute fully to continuous improvement.
- Further develop the use made of information and communication technology to enhance learning in training sessions and use the company's own internet facility as a learning resource.
- Further involve employers in the development of training programmes, including their participation in learners' progress reviews and the evaluation of courses.
- Ensure that the self-assessment report clearly identifies the key areas for improvement, and consequently contributes fully to developing and prioritising actions in the quality improvement plan.
- Continue developing the learners' knowledge of equality of opportunity and diversity, ensuring that what they know is fully recorded in the reviews so as to measure their progress with these topics.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the friendly, approachable and supportive assessors
- the flexibility assessors have when planning their visits
- the facility to progress faster
- being able to work and obtaining a qualification at the same time
- the enjoyable training and feeling safe
- their increased self-esteem and feeling proud of their achievement.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the communication they have with assessors to ensure that they understand their learning needs and preferences better.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the effective communications with assessors
- the reliability and flexibility demonstrated by Alder Training
- the competent, experienced and supportive assessors
- the way Alder Training meets the needs of their organisation
- their working relationship with the assessor to provide training that meets each individual learner's needs.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the frequency of communication to inform them about their learners' progress.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. In the last five years, Alder Training has demonstrated that it has a good capacity to improve by increasing the size of its training provision and further improving its outcomes for learners and the quality of provision. Success rates have been improved across all programmes. In particular, timely success rates have experienced a sustained improvement in the last five years, with a remarkable increase in the last 12 months. The provider has rectified all the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, although, in a few programmes, there is still too much reliance on the gathering of written evidence.
9. The processes of self-assessment and development planning are satisfactory overall. The provider uses its quality assurance process very effectively to evaluate the quality of provision continuously. The self-assessment report is largely accurate; however, it is insufficiently clear at highlighting the key strengths and areas for improvement in the organisation. The link between the report and the quality improvement plan needs further development.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates are good overall. Since 2005, overall success rates have greatly increased in all programmes. Success rates are good in the apprenticeship programmes which 73% of the learners are following. They are also good in the newly introduced customer service programme and for those learners undertaking a Skills for Life qualification. Success rates in the Train to Gain programmes are satisfactory. Attendance at the off-the-job training sessions in dental care has improved and is now very high. There are no significant variations in the achievement rates of different groups of learners. Learners enjoy their learning.
11. Learners confidently develop good vocational skills in dental nursing and childcare, in particular. All learners increase their confidence and are aware of the importance of respect and confidentiality, with many using technical language appropriately. Current progress made by learners is good and 86% of all apprentices have achieved their qualification ahead of the planned end date. Within the Train to Gain programmes, 38% of the learners have also completed their programme early.
12. Timely success rates across all programmes are satisfactory. They were low in the apprenticeship programmes between 2005 and 2008 but they have increased in the last five years, and more specifically, greatly improved in the last year, and are now 8% above the national average. Timely success rates in the Train to Gain programmes have increased by 65% in the last four years, from a very low starting point and are currently 4% above the national average.

13. Progression by learners onto higher levels is good. In the last year, all foundation learners have progressed onto an apprenticeship programme; 62% of apprentices progressed onto an advanced apprenticeship. Many learners have been promoted in the workplace, thereby improving their economic well-being. Learners adhere to safe working practices and feel safe.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

14. The quality of teaching, training and learning is good. Learners benefit from both highly effective individual coaching and group teaching. The results of initial assessment inform learning plans and ensure that learning methods match the individual's preferred learning style. Tutors know their learners well and adapt sessions to meet the learners' needs and to make the most of resources. They make good use of individual learning plans and interim targets to monitor their learners' progress. Training advisors, tutors and assessors are knowledgeable and well qualified. However, they do not always maximise the use of information learning technology to enhance learning.
15. Assessment and verification practices are good. Assessors work flexibly, visiting learners at weekends, accommodating learners' shifts and work patterns and satisfying the needs of employers. They arrange visits at times that allow them to capture naturally occurring evidence, allowing several learners to achieve faster. Assessors make good use of directed questioning to assess learners' knowledge and understanding. They generally produce well written observations of learners' performance. The range of assessment methods has been appropriately increased. However, in a few areas, there is still too much reliance on written records and observations.
16. The good range of provision meets learners', employers', and business needs well. Learning programmes are relevant, well structured, and include a good choice of vocational subjects. The range of programmes and levels has increased with the new provision in customer services. There are good progression routes, and assessors encourage learners to progress by organising visits to local universities. The provider has increased the recruitment to its foundation learning programmes of young people and adults with few qualifications and from disadvantaged areas. Some learners participate in enrichment programmes such as fundraising for charity and volunteering schemes that help them gain additional experience.
17. Partnership working is very strong and there are good links with schools and community organisations. Communication with employers is particularly effective. Regular meetings and frequent visits to their premises to discuss their training needs feature strongly. The links between on- and off-the-job training have been strengthened. Not all employers are sufficiently involved in programme development and training processes, such as the initial assessment of learners and their progress reviews. However, they generally know how well learners are progressing with their programmes.

18. Care, guidance and support are good and help learners achieve their learning goals. Employers appreciate the inclusive approach of the provider to learners who need additional help or support. Staff offer sensitive support to all learners to help them overcome any social and personal barriers to successful learning. Learners at risk of making slow progress receive particularly good support. The provider offers good guidance to ensure that learners enrol on the appropriate vocational programme. There is good support for learners to develop their key skills. Learners with additional learning needs benefit from more frequent visits and learners with dyslexia can obtain specialist support.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

19. Alder Training has a well planned strategy, clearly linked to achieving its mission and meeting local and national priorities. It pays close attention to ensuring that the programmes offered meet the changing needs of employers and learners. Subcontractor arrangements are well developed to provide good progression routes into apprenticeships for those learners with lower levels of attainment upon leaving school.
20. Operational management of the provision is good. Communications with staff are particularly effective through well designed and informative monthly reports and good use of the intranet to support those employers who work remotely. The provider closely monitors the progress of individual learners and undertakes good performance management of its staff. The staff appraisal process is thorough, although the agreed targets are not always sufficiently challenging.
21. Arrangements to engage with users are good. Employees provide weekly feedback on a wide range of issues, contributing well to informing quality improvement activities and the identification of training needs. Employers engage well with the quality surveys. However, attempts to introduce an employer forum have been less successful. Engagement with learners is also good through frequent surveys and evaluations and more recently a learner forum. Feedback from learners and employers leads to significant changes and improvements to the delivery of training and provision of resources and social facilities. Overall, the provider delivers good value for money.
22. The provider has a good understanding of its areas for development and has been very effective at improving the provision and increasing success rates. The outcomes of quality improvement and assurance activities are reported in detail at the frequent senior management team meetings to monitor their impact. Some aspects within the use of the management information system are insufficiently developed. The provider does not have an overall view of the progress of learners on programme. The reasons for learners who unsuccessfully leave the programme early are not reported in sufficient detail.
23. The provider meets the current government's requirements in relation to safeguarding. Furthermore, it has prioritised well the development of the safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults in the organisation. There

is a clear strategy for safeguarding and a strong emphasis on the promotion and monitoring of well-being of learners. It has risk-assessed where the most vulnerable learners are and has worked well with external specialist agencies to safeguard them.

24. The promotion of equality and diversity to staff, learners and employers by means of a comprehensive policy and strategy plan is good. Frequent staff training takes place and regular monitoring checks ensure that employers adhere to equality and diversity matters. The provider has greatly improved outcomes for learners by identifying and taking suitable steps to close achievement gaps for male learners and for apprentices with additional learning needs. The ethnic profile of the learner population matches that of the area where the provider is based and the provider has set up challenging, but realistic, targets to increase the recruitment of male learners.
25. Alder Training celebrates diversity by sharing information with staff and learners on religious festivals, cultural and social topics. The promotion of equality and diversity is well embedded in the learners' induction process. However, the development of the learners' knowledge on equality and diversity is not always sufficiently recorded on the progress review forms.
26. The self-assessment process is inclusive and well informed by the views of staff, learners and employers. However, the self-assessment report, although extensive, does not clearly identify the key strengths or areas for improvement. The resulting quality improvement plan is very closely aligned to the business development plan but is insufficiently informed by self-assessment to be able to prioritise the key objectives for improvement.

Information about the inspection

27. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's performance director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from funding bodies, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
28. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires that learners and employers had recently completed at the request of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Alder Training Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Part-time learners	748	748
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	2 3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
Quality of provision	2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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