

# Alpha Care Agency

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 58538

**Name of lead inspector:** Nick Crombie HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 24 September 2010

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

**Address:** ACA Institute  
5 Blackhorse Lane  
London E17 6DS

**Telephone number:** 0208 5271627

## Information about the provider

1. Alpha Care Agency (ACA) has not been inspected before.
2. ACA is based in Walthamstow and originally contracted with the London Learning and Skills Council in May 2008 to deliver Train to Gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) in health and social care. It has also since contracted to deliver NVQs in business administration and Skills for Life. There are currently 69 health and social care learners, all of whom are age 19 and over. Fifty-one learners are working towards adult health and social care at NVQ level 3, seven towards NVQ level 3 in children and young people, seven towards level 2 in health and social care, and two on level 2 and two on level 3 childcare and learning development. Government-funded training represents the majority of ACA's work.
3. Just over 48% of the local population are qualified at NVQ level 2 or below, in comparison to 64% in London generally and 65% in the United Kingdom. In 2008/09, the percentage of school pupils gaining 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE was 46%, compared with 54% in London overall.
4. The local economy is characterised by small- and medium-sized businesses. In August 2010, 5.5% of the population was claiming jobseeker's allowance compared with 4% in London and 3.6% nationally.
5. Waltham Forest is ethnically diverse with a broad range of faith communities. The proportion of the population belonging to a minority ethnic group rose from 25.6% in the 1991 census to 35.5% of the resident population in 2001. Around 44% of residents are now from a minority ethnic background.
6. In 2008/09, 62% of ACA's learners were of African descent, the majority Black or Black British/African. Thirty seven per cent were of Asian or Asian/British descent. White learners comprised less than 1% of the total. Under 10% of learners were male. These percentages are broadly the same in 2009/10.
7. ACA does not have any formal contracting or subcontracting arrangements with other providers.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
<b>Employer provision:</b> Train to Gain	337 learners

## Summary report

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>
	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	4
Safeguarding	4
Equality and diversity	4
<b>Subject Areas</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Health and Social Care	3

## Overall effectiveness

8. The overall effectiveness of the provision is inadequate. ACA has made numerous improvements to the quality of its provision but much remains work in progress. A particularly positive impact has been the significant improvement, compared with national rates, in the percentage of health and social care learners completing their programmes within planned timescales.
9. Newly appointed specialist staff are improving the underpinning systems and general operational elements of ACA including the standard of internal verification and elements of assessment practice. However, some aspects are only just being introduced and office administration and learner support systems are not consistently effective.
10. Learners develop a good level of new skills and expertise which they apply well in their employment. The quality of training, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Most learners are adequately supported to succeed, but observations, target setting and progress reviews are not always timely nor consistently monitored for quality for all learners. ACA meets employers' and learners' needs well and is responsive to their requirements. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.
11. Self-assessment is inadequate. ACA carried out its first ever self-assessment immediately before the inspection, although it was originally required to do so in December 2009. Although this provided an honest profile of what ACA saw

as its strengths and areas for improvement, the report has had no impact on improving the provision overall.

12. ACA staff and learners have insufficient understanding of the principles and practice of equality and diversity. The majority of learners cannot give a satisfactory account of how they promote equality for service users, their colleagues and themselves. ACA has not put any of its staff through specific training to help them relate equality to their particular training area or practice. Equality and diversity are not reinforced during learner reviews.
13. ACA's safeguarding arrangements are inadequate. They have not been given sufficient prioritisation or rigorous management. However, learners feel safe.

## Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. ACA's actions to improve the number of learners achieving their NVQs within planned timescales have been effective. All learners now achieve at, or around, national rates. The improvement in learners' success on child development and well-being programmes has been substantial. Some minority ethnic learners do not achieve as well as others.
- Learners, particularly at level 3, develop and apply good practical skills for their own benefit and those of service users. They gain useful knowledge and confidence in their professional practice. For example, learners are able to communicate with service-users more effectively; improved team working helps enhance the overall level of care provided.
- The standard of learners' work in portfolios is satisfactory and meets the awarding body's requirements, but the layout and organisation of some portfolios are muddled.
- Learners feel safe. They generally demonstrate a good understanding and practice of health and safety in the course of their employment.
- Training, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Learners enjoy their learning. The use of training resources is satisfactory and ACA's new training rooms are fit for purpose. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and most are working towards appropriate teaching qualifications.
- The observation of learners' practical skills is sometimes carried out too late in the programme which prevents early identification of what they can improve. A few learners are unclear about learning targets or their progress towards completion.
- ACA meets employers' and learners' needs well and is responsive to their requirements. Many of ACA's current learners are there through word-of-mouth recommendation from former learners. ACA provides a good range of additional courses and customised training. It is widening participation amongst some community groups who would otherwise not access traditional learning.
- ACA has responded positively to the many challenges it has identified in terms of improving the provision and managing the increased range of programmes.

Whilst improvement has taken place, much is still work in progress. Some office administration and support systems are not fully integrated or efficient.

- The promotion and understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity are inadequate. Staff have not received training appropriate to their area of training. Learners' induction to equality and diversity focuses on employment rights and responsibilities rather than wider practice.
- Learners feel safe, but ACA's safeguarding arrangements are inadequate. The arrangements require greater prioritisation, and aspects, such as monitoring of CRB checks, require more rigorous management.
- Self-assessment is inadequate. Self-assessment was undertaken only in the week before inspection and the process has had no impact on improving the provision. Nevertheless, the self-assessment report is of sufficient quality to be used as the foundation for developing an overall quality improvement system.

### **What does Alpha Care Agency need to do to improve further?**

- Further strengthen and develop the management and monitoring systems which have supported the significant improvements in rates of completion within the planned time in order to consistently exceed national rates.
- In particular, develop the planning and monitoring of learners' progress to increase all learners' understanding of their programme targets and further improve progress and outcomes. Continue to work towards earlier and more frequent use of observation and assessment to inform each learner fully of their areas for improvement.
- Prioritise the introduction of an integrated office administration system to improve the quality of information on all learners and ensure learners' progress and targets are always up to date and readily accessible by all relevant ACA staff.
- Use the recently completed self-assessment report, the Common Inspection Framework and the outcomes of the inspection as the basis to develop a comprehensive quality improvement action plan covering all aspects of the provision.
- Introduce regular formal observation and assessment of the quality of training and learning to identify and promote good practice amongst tutors and assessors.
- Improve staff and learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity using focused and coordinated staff training to deliver consistent and effective promotion and explanation of equality of opportunity and diversity during learners' induction, reviews and training.
- Embed ACA's new safeguarding policy and guidance into ACA's operation through systematic awareness raising and training for all staff to ensure that there is consistent understanding of practice and policy in this area.

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## **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What learners like:**

- the quiet, warm rooms at the centre which make it easy for learners to work and give a good feeling
- that there is lots of help when learners need it
- the people – who are friendly and nice
- the training in the centre – providing learners with a good opportunity to meet with assessors if advice is needed
- the knowledgeable and very practical assessors
- that learning is not age limited
- that the college is very supportive.

### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- keeping the same assessor all the way through to provide consistency
- the toilet facilities at the centre
- the rooms, which are cramped for large groups.

## **Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**

### **What employers like:**

- the graduation ceremony; learners like it and it encourages others
- the assessors demonstrate and promote commitment to good health and social care practice
- that ACA is friendly, helpful and local.

### **What employers would like to see improved:**

- more support with English for speakers of other languages
- more support for learners with literacy, numeracy or language needs
- better communications from ACA.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 3**

14. ACA has undertaken a detailed review of all aspects of its operation to identify what needs to be improved and regularly reviews its progress over time. ACA recognises some continuing impediments to progress and efficiency, notably the lack of formality and rigour of some office administration and support systems. It aims to introduce new integrated systems to deal with the problem.
15. ACA's actions to improve all learners' timely success rates have been effective, and these have risen rapidly to national rates. Internal verification and assessment practice are improving, although some aspects remain as work in progress. ACA's management is receptive to change, committed to improving the provision and providing the resources and specialist expertise to do so. New staff are having a very positive impact on improving quality. However, the outcome of succession planning for a key management role was not decided at the time of inspection.
16. ACA uses the views of learners and employers well to shape and promote improvement.
17. Self-assessment against the Common Inspection Framework is at a very early stage within ACA. The very recently produced self-assessment report was open and evaluative but has had no impact on improving the provision. Nevertheless, the report is a useful foundation on which to build a learner-centred quality improvement system.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 3**

18. Learners' success rates have improved during 2009/10 to national rates. In 2008/09, the timely success rates for all ACA's health and social care learners were well below national rates at 32% for NVQ level 2 and 55% for level 3. The completion rate within the planned time for the child development and well-being courses was extremely poor at 0%. Overall success rates were, however, just satisfactory.
19. In 2009/10 to date, the timely level 2 success rate has risen to marginally below the national rate of 70% and eight percentage points above the national rate at level 3. However, these data may rise or fall in the three month period to December 2010.
20. Improvements in different groups' success rates have been substantial. In 2008/09 the rate of completion within the planned time for female learners was low, at 28%, compared with 70% for males. Each group now succeeds at close to national rates. In 2008/09 the rate of completion within the planned time for minority ethnic learners was also very low; 7% for Asian British and 48% for Black or Black British learners. The performance of these overall groups has

improved significantly, close to national rates, but some variance remains between some Asian and Black minority ethnic subgroups.

21. Most learners make satisfactory progress. The standard of work in their portfolios is satisfactory, and meets the awarding body's requirements, but the order and layout of some portfolios are muddled. Learners, particularly at level 3, develop good skills, knowledge and confidence in their professional practice. Learners communicate with service-users more effectively. Improved team-working helps enhance the overall level of care provided. Some learners have been promoted at work.
22. Learners feel safe and generally work according to well-understood principles of health and safety.

### **The quality of provision**

### **Grade 3**

23. Training, learning and assessment are satisfactory. Learners attend satisfactory training sessions at ACA's premises and at their workplaces. Learners enjoy their learning. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and most are working towards an appropriate level of teaching qualification. The use of training resources is satisfactory and ACA's training rooms are fit for purpose. Assessors use a range of appropriate methods to gather evidence of learners' knowledge and skills, cross-referenced to the national standards. Learners are also encouraged to reference their own evidence.
24. All learners have an adequate initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy levels and they receive satisfactory feedback on their performance. Where a need is identified ACA refers learners to another organisation for specialist support.
25. ACA sets monthly performance targets for each assessor. These targets are also used to monitor learners' progress. However, the set targets do not include evaluation of the quality of assessors' interactions with their learners. Inspectors found that the observation of learners' practical skills is sometimes carried out late in the programme, preventing early identification of what learners need to improve. A few learners are unclear about their targets and their progress towards completion.
26. ACA meets employers' and learners' needs well and it is responsive to their requirements. ACA has developed satisfactory working relationships with a number of employers in the London area. Most employers provide learners with time off for training. Many learners in the current cohorts have enrolled with ACA because of word-of-mouth recommendation from former learners.
27. ACA provides a good range of additional courses and customised training which contribute to the NVQ and provide professional development for ACA employees. ACA is widening participation to learners from some community groups who would otherwise find it difficult to access traditional learning.



28. Information advice and guidance are satisfactory and some learners have been encouraged to progress to higher levels of training and take on more responsibility at work.

## Leadership and management

## Grade 4

29. ACA has taken appropriate actions to improve its provision, although many of these actions are work in progress. Over the past two years ACA has struggled to manage the workload arising from offering an ever-increasing number of NVQ programmes. The quality of delivery suffered and outcomes were low. Administration was sometimes ineffective, and in some respects remains so.
30. At the end of 2009 ACA identified a number of key business priorities for improvement and it has implemented successfully some appropriate strategies and systems for tackling areas of underperformance. Some of these are only just being introduced but some aspects, such as new specialist staff, have already had a very positive impact on learners' experience of the programmes. Succession planning to fill one key managerial post has not been completed. ACA recently moved into larger accommodation. The increased space and resources are used adequately, and valued by staff and learners.
31. ACA's board provides satisfactory oversight and support to ACA's senior management team. Progress toward achieving improvement is monitored and reported upon in adequate detail to the board. Action planning is satisfactory.
32. ACA's arrangements for safeguarding are inadequate. ACA has not given the arrangements sufficient prioritisation. A designated person with ultimate responsibility for safeguarding is in place, with appropriate training. However, ACA's overarching new safeguarding policy and guidance document were each introduced in the week before inspection, replacing an out-of-date policy, but without formal training for staff. Most assessors have received some relevant training in the past, but there has been no systematic and coordinated approach to raising the awareness of all staff in current safeguarding practice and procedures. There have been no recent reports to the board on safeguarding issues, the last being January 2009. Safeguarding has only been made a standard agenda item for management meetings from September onwards.
33. The system for recording which members of staff have a current enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check is not sufficiently rigorous or well organised. One assessor does not have a current Criminal Records Bureau check in place, which ACA was not aware of until the inspection. ACA is re-applying for Criminal Records Bureau checks for training staff who currently hold these with other organisations, but these are still in process. ACA does not have any links with relevant external agencies.
34. The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is inadequate. ACA has a strong focus on meeting the needs of individual learners, although the practice is not consistent for all. Learners make use of the complaints procedure, but

there has been insufficient formal recording of complaints or outcomes. Most complaints relate to missing certificates or missed appointments by assessors.

35. Recent marketing materials include positive images of learners from a wide range of different ethnic groups. The number of White learners is now growing but still represents an extremely small proportion of learners. ACA's celebration of learners' success is satisfactory. The most recent, high profile graduation event was not well attended by learners.
36. The majority of learners are unable to give a satisfactory account of how they promote equality for service users, their colleagues and themselves. Equality and diversity are not promoted during reviews or training sessions. Learners' induction only includes a direction to read ACA's policy, but this policy largely relates to ACA's approach to its employees rather than its approach to learners, learning and service-users. The current policy does not make reference to all current legislation, and the text uses language which is out of date. ACA staff have not received any formal equality and diversity training coordinated and determined by ACA.
37. ACA has no strategic plan or impact measures to address clear differences in timely success rates by different minority ethnic subgroups, although it has responded very positively to improve the very poor success rates of a distinct group of female learners.
38. ACA's engagement with users is satisfactory. Learners' and employers' views are formally gathered and collated in easy-to-read documents. There is no evidence of any formal analysis of, or response to, key issues, but ACA is increasingly responsive to learners' and employers' views and has made improvements to its provision as a result.
39. Self-assessment is inadequate. Neither self-assessment nor the Common Inspection Framework have played any prior part in ACA's approach to quality improvement practice or improvement action planning. ACA does not undertake any formal observation and assessment of the quality of its training. ACA's first ever self-assessment was produced in the week before inspection. The self-assessment process included consultation with staff. The self-assessment report is an open and reasonably evaluative appraisal of ACA's strengths and areas for improvement but the majority of the areas for improvement do not reflect inspectors' judgements. There is no associated quality improvement action plan. However, the self-assessment report does provide a reasonable foundation for the development of an all-embracing new quality system.
40. ACA provides satisfactory value for money. Learners' outcomes are currently satisfactory. ACA has invested appropriately in new staff and physical resources which enhance the quality of learning.

## Information about the inspection

41. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, past comment from the local Learning and Skills Agency and present comment from the Skills Funding Agency, data on learners and their achievement.
42. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from the health and social care programmes.

<p><b>Record of Main Findings (RMF)</b></p> <p><b>Alpha Care Agency</b></p> <p><b>Employer responsive:</b> Train to Gain</p>
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Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	<b>Employer responsive</b>
<b>Approximate number of enrolled learners</b>	69	69
Part-time learners		
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	3	
<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	3 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>	-	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	-	
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
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?	3	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>	
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	4	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	4	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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