

Alpha Care Agency Institute

Focused monitoring visit report

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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FOCUSED MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Context and focus of visit

Alpha Care Agency Institute (ACA), based in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, originally contracted with the London Learning and Skills Council in May 2008 to deliver Train to Gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in health, care and public services. Subjects offered included health and social care, caring for children and young people, and children's care, learning and development. It has also since contracted to deliver NVQs in business administration and Skills for Life.

Government-funded training represents the majority of ACA's work. Learners are recruited from Waltham Forest and neighbouring London boroughs, but some are also drawn from the Greater London area. Some 85 Train to Gain learners are currently completing NVQs in care-related subjects at levels 2 and 3. They are mainly employed in residential care homes, domiciliary care providers, day care services and early years settings.

ACA was first inspected in September 2010, as a single subject provider. Equality and diversity, safeguarding, leadership and management and overall effectiveness were judged to be inadequate. Outcomes for learners, the quality of provision and capacity to improve were satisfactory.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

<p>What progress has been made in using the outcomes of the inspection as the basis to develop a comprehensive quality improvement action plan covering all aspects of the provision?</p>	<p>Reasonable progress</p>
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A useful quality improvement plan (QIP) has been produced that clearly identifies the areas for improvement specified at the previous inspection. Linkages between the QIP and the quality action planning cycle are clear. The introduction of key strategies for developing operating principles is beneficial. A red, amber, green (RAG) rating system indicates at a glance the level of progress made in implementing actions. The approach focuses on all aspects of the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and the identified areas for improvement within each aspect. Progress towards targets is reviewed monthly. The existing quality assurance meeting framework has been widened to include mandatory policy issues, such as safeguarding and equality and diversity. Internal verifiers meet to review mandatory issues as they have an impact on assessment practice and the learners' journey. Outcomes from these meetings are fed into the quality assurance meetings, as appropriate. Mandatory actions are prioritised. All staff are keen to make improvements and in the six months since the previous inspection, ACA has made reasonable progress in most areas requiring action.

What progress has been made in developing the self-assessment processes and compiling the final self-assessment report (SAR)?

Insufficient progress

At the previous inspection, self-assessment against the CIF was at a very early stage and the then recently-produced self-assessment report was open and evaluative, but had no impact on improving the provision. These concerns remain. The current self-assessment report was produced appropriately using feedback from learners and employers who are surveyed at key points in the year. The data from the surveys are shared with senior managers and the discussions from these meetings create a useful narrative about the quality and value of the training provision and improvement actions. Staff helpfully contribute to judgements. However, the process does not refine and distil information to create a clear and critical view of the organisation.

The final SAR does not include an introductory narrative about the organisation and its provision. It has no description of the self-assessment process and does not include areas of clear strength or areas for improvement. The report is unclear in what constitutes evidence and what an evaluative statement is. Much of the commentary against each aspect of the CIF is largely descriptive. Some sub-aspects are not included in the report and others are not graded, for example equality and diversity and safeguarding.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in maintaining the momentum of improvement in learners' outcomes noted at the last inspection?

Reasonable progress

Outcomes for learners at the last inspection were satisfactory and the report noted that actions for improvement had been effective. Appropriate actions have been taken by ACA to support further improvement, although their effectiveness has so far been limited. A first assessment of learners now takes place within one month of them starting their programme, compared with three months at the time of the last inspection. Learners' absence from training events is now followed up more quickly using mobile telephone messages to learners. The monitoring of learners' progress towards their qualification is more robust and frequent. Better use of management information now provides ACA with useful information on the relative success rates of learners from different ethnic groups. Internal verifiers more regularly monitor individual learning plans.

Previous success rates have been largely maintained. In 2009/10, the overall success rate was 89.5% and the success rate for courses completed within their planned time was 67.5%. Provisional data provided by ACA at the time of this visit suggest that, in the current year, overall success rates match those of 2009/10. Success rate of completions within planned timescales in 2010/11, however, show a fall of some 7% on 2009/10.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in improving the planning and monitoring of learners' progress to increase learners' understanding of their programme targets? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection, the observation of learners' practical skills was sometimes carried out late in their programme, preventing early identification of what learners needed to improve. A few learners were unclear about their progress. Since then there have been clear actions within ACA, through the well-considered quality improvement plan, to resolve these areas for improvement. A useful 'NVQ timetable', issued to all staff and learners, has been developed detailing learning, assessment and feedback events through the planned period of learning. Learners are now better aware of what they can expect and what is expected of them. The understanding of deadlines has improved and a healthy competition has grown up amongst learners, who are generally more aware of their progress.

ACA has introduced constructive progress monitoring meetings. Schedules published for the year indicate a useful rolling agenda of monitoring and training taking place. The introduction of a visually clear system for tracking learners' progress, based on RAG ratings, is helpful. There is now better communication between staff on learners' progress, supported by a new 'concerns form' where individuals' needs can be recorded and shared.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in introducing an integrated office administration system to improve the quality of information on all learners? **Reasonable progress**

At the previous inspection, prioritising the introduction of an integrated office administration to improve the quality of learner information was a key area for improvement. The organisation has clearly improved access to management information for assessors, internal verifiers and managers, who can all now directly access learner information from their computers. All staff are now required to access their emails daily, providing faster dissemination of management information and improved ownership of data. ACA has received beneficial support and training from external consultants to make staff more aware of the importance of management information in managing the provision, and to support the development of 'learner journey' data. The number of internal verifiers has increased since the last inspection, from three to five. The verifiers' workload is now more manageable, providing more time to consider the available data.

ACA has made the appropriate decision to move its data management from an Excel spreadsheet to a relational database, matching the systems of the funding body. Managers are gaining useful experience in understanding and reconciling management information, but they recognise that this is still work in progress. There remains a lack of clarity within ACA as to the basis of some key performance

indicators. Insufficient awareness of standard definitions, for example on achievements, creates confusion in internal and external discussion.

What progress has been made in improving staff and learners' understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, equality and diversity were not promoted during reviews or training sessions and staff had had no formal equality and diversity training. Now, equality and diversity have become more prominent in the organisation. Learners are able to recall their induction and the inclusion of equality and diversity well. They understand the impact of equal opportunities on the client groups they work with, but also have a clearer understanding of the affect on them as learners. Learners speak highly of the support they have received to meet their individual needs, such as extra help from assessors to understand more clearly the NVQ terminology, the difficulties they may have with dependent care needs and the opportunities to attend off-the-job training at the centre.

The provision of training to explore equality and diversity has been useful and ACA has introduced a structured training plan. ACA has created a more comprehensive equality, diversity and well-being policy. Equality and diversity are now promoted in all progress reviews, although the records of discussions between assessors and learners are insufficiently detailed. The distribution of questionnaires has been useful in gaining learner and employer views of ACA's approach to promoting equality and diversity.

What progress has been made in embedding ACA's new safeguarding policy and guidance into its operation to ensure that there is consistent understanding of practice and policy in this area?

Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, a low priority was given to safeguarding and there was no systematic and coordinated approach to raising the awareness of all staff in current safeguarding practice and procedures. Staff training has now been completed and staff have a greater awareness of safeguarding issues as they have an impact on learners. Records of enhanced Criminal Records Bureau outcomes are kept, although a simple list to track progress on completion and renewal has yet to be devised. The revised child and vulnerable adults' protection policy and procedures are clear and comprehensive and include useful information on signs of abuse, referral procedures and recording information. Some further revisions are required to reflect accurately the operational activities introduced to reinforce safeguarding. Prioritisation has increased and it is a standing agenda item at monthly risk meetings.

Induction arrangements include safeguarding, and this is followed up during progress reviews. The current progress review form has yet to be revised to include an area for the recording of safeguarding discussions. ACA has produced a

satisfactory strategy for embedding safeguarding as a response to the inspection findings. Learners have increased their understanding of safeguarding.

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