

Acacia Training Ltd

Focused monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 52883

Name of lead inspector: Kathryn Townsley HMI

Last day of inspection: 27 June 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Acacia House
Trentham Business Quarter
Bellringer Road
Trentham
Stoke on Trent
ST4 8GB

Telephone number: 01782 646346

Focused Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

Acacia Training Limited (ATL) is a private training provider established in 2000 to provide training in health and social care and early years for adult learners. Since the last inspection ATL has stopped offering training in business administration and customer service. All 1,232 learners are employed in adult care or early years settings; 724 learners are on intermediate and 508 learners on advanced courses. ATL also offers a range of short courses to care and early years providers and runs a care recruitment agency. A recent partnership arrangement with Lincoln College has recruited 20 learners and more are planned in the next year.

At the last inspection in May 2010, outcomes for learners, quality of provision and leadership and management were judged to be satisfactory. Recommendations were focused on improving success rates, planning for, and monitoring learner progress and aspects of leadership and management. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has Acacia made to ensure that self-assessment is effective in identifying and addressing areas for improvement?	Insufficient progress
---	------------------------------

At the last inspection, the self-assessment process was judged to be inclusive but the resulting report was too descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative. Since then senior managers have completed additional training in the evaluation of provision and the compilation of a self-assessment report. The process remains inclusive with staff actively involved in evaluating performance. ATL uses learners' and employers' views effectively to inform and contribute to the overall evaluations. However, ATL does not use its own internal quality-assurance outcomes or internal and external performance data to support judgements within the report. Too many grades are overly inflated and the report remains generally descriptive. Key elements of the provision, such as the quality of teaching and learning, are not included within the report. The quality-improvement plan includes areas of weak practice, but is not supported by clear, measurable, time-bound improvement targets. ATL have not fully implemented all the recommendations from the last inspection.

Outcomes for learners

What actions have been taken in order to improve success rates within planned timescales? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection overall outcomes for learners were satisfactory, particularly for literacy and numeracy qualifications, but too few learners completed their qualification within the planned time. ATL no longer has learners on literacy and numeracy qualifications. Actions to address regional variations between learners have been successful, for example, ceasing work with employers whose learners did not complete. In 2010/11 overall success rates fell to 78%, intermediate qualifications to 75% and advanced qualifications to 70%. Timely success rates fell to 54% for intermediate and 50% for advanced qualifications.

Actions taken to address the high percentage of learners leaving without a qualification have had some success with a significant reduction from 57% to 19%. Work intended to reduce the number of learners continuing beyond their planned end date has had some success, but the number remains high at around 200. Assessors now identify learners who are within three months of their planned completion and additional support is put in place to ensure they complete on time. However, data showing the percentage of units completed are not used effectively to identify those learners who are not making progress early in their programme.

Quality of provision

What progress has been made in ensuring that learners' progress reviews are key in driving their learning and development? Insufficient progress

The last inspection identified a number of key weaknesses in the setting, planning for, measuring and monitoring of progress towards targets by learners. A range of separate initiatives have been introduced including improved target planning, monitoring the percentage achievement of each unit and regular reviews of assessor performance. Some of the initiatives, for example measuring actual against expected achievement throughout the planned completion time, have not been fully implemented. There is no coherent overall plan that clearly shows the links between and use of each stage of the tracking of learner progress. Learner reviews are now more detailed and include a measurement of progress against each unit which is recorded on a chart, but learners and employers do not have a copy of the document. Although assessors and verifiers are now more informed about the progress of their learners, senior managers do not effectively use the data on the relative progress of learners or those who are passed their planned completion date to monitor assessor performance. The percentage achievement rate of each learner is not used effectively or early enough to amend targets and offer the support required to ensure timely completion of their qualifications.

Leadership and management

What progress has been made in ensuring that strategic planning is comprehensive and successfully considers the future development of learning programmes?

Reasonable progress

ATL has a clear understanding of its areas of expertise and uses this knowledge effectively in strategically planning future developments and initiatives. The company has established good partnership working with other providers that complement its own organisational culture and vision. Building on its detailed knowledge of the care sector, ATL has restructured its delivery with a greater focus on extending its health, social care and childcare programme offer, whilst directing learners to more appropriate providers in other subject areas. The company's three-year business plan takes appropriate account of local, regional and national priorities within its five overarching objectives. The company self-assessment report and the needs of employers also inform the plan. The managing director produces a detailed annual strategic plan that is supported by suitable targets and appropriate operational actions. This effectively forms the basis for all the company operational plans. Each departmental team develops a comprehensive operational plan that reflects the strategic plan but also includes service-level agreements. However, detailed operational plans do not clearly link their objectives to performance targets that promote improvement or support the achievement of strategic targets

What progress has been made in the further development and implementation of comprehensive and effective quality-improvement arrangements?

Insufficient progress

In line with inspection recommendations, ATL has developed a quality assurance schedule that covers most aspects of the programmes; however, this is still incomplete and does not support the effective and pro-active review of practice against set criteria. The company has not yet developed appropriate quality policies that inform staff of the purpose of, and support attached to, quality assurance processes, including the observation of teaching and learning. However, senior managers do react quickly and effectively to quality issues when raised by staff. The regular and productive quality meetings provide a forum for managers to raise these issues where managers take swift and good actions to remedy inconsistencies and improve practice.

Since the last inspection ATL has implemented, amended and re-introduced a sound process for the observation of teaching and learning. Reports are detailed, sufficiently evaluative and generally focus well on learning. Although observation grades accurately reflect the commentary and result in good actions for improvement they do not identify who is responsible for monitoring that improvements are taking place.

Internal verification does not yet form part of the quality cycle. However, ATL has invested well in establishing an effective team of internal verifiers. Frequent and productive standardisation meetings provide guidance and support staff in developing resources that help learners compile evidence. External verifier reports speak of strong and effective verification processes.

How effective is the use of management information in monitoring and improving performance?

Insufficient progress

The last inspection found too little analysis and use of management information. ATL still does not have clear systems and a structure that ensures the use of accurate and appropriate data to inform strategic, planning and performance management. Data are not sufficiently analysed at scheme and qualification level, managers do not have a clear view of the relative success levels of learners by geographical area, assessors, and other indicators. Targets for improved performance are too broad; for example, one is just to improve success rates with no indication of by how much or the target date. A number of management information reports are produced but these lack the required detail and are not used consistently across the organisation; for example, success rates are analysed by gender and ethnicity for the equality group but this is not shared with all assessors. Assessors are not informed of the success rates by level or subject. Some measure of the percentage progress by learners is made but this does not contribute to assessing performance by, or of, assessors and managers.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk