

Acacia Training Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		15-19 April 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- Too many learners on health and social care courses, which make up the majority of the provision, leave the programme without completing all aspects of their training programmes.
- Not enough teaching and coaching is good or outstanding. Better sessions clearly link theory to practice, but assessors do not make sufficient use of available technology to support learning.
- Verbal feedback following assessments is very detailed, but written feedback is too brief and is insufficient to help learners understand what they have to do to improve.
- The planning for the introduction of functional skills has been slow.
- Operational managers require further development for them to become fully effective.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Success rates for the minority of learners on programmes in child development and well-being, service enterprise and business administration are high.
- Learners develop a range of good vocational skills, which improve their employability and meet the needs of employers and care service users well.
- Many assessors and employers use their significant vocational experience to good effect and support learners in improving their employability through increased care skills.
- Assessment is frequent, thorough and well-planned to meet the needs of learners who work unsocial hours and those who are required to work flexibly to reflect the needs of care service users.
- Senior managers have improved success rates on all programmes through their increased collection, analysis and use of management information to support staff performance management and self-assessment.
- Acacia works very well with employers to help identify and meet their skills needs.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of learners who complete all parts of their framework within the planned duration of their training by accurately monitoring individual learners' progress and better coordinating the learning and assessment opportunities within the workplace.
- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning by planning coaching to meet the needs of all learners, including better planned use of information and communication technology (ICT) and extension activities that maintain an appropriate pace and motivation, particularly for the more-able learners.
- Make sure all employers fully understand their contribution to the training programmes. In particular, ensuring they agree learning targets during reviews so that learners and employers know exactly how to use work activities to help learners complete their apprenticeship.
- Ensure all learners receive detailed, written feedback following assessments which accurately record their progress towards their main learning aims, identifies the skills they have developed and helps them to plan what they have to do to succeed.
- Improve the quality of training and assessment for all learners by introducing clear managerial lines of responsibility for quality improvement, supported by robust quality improvement arrangements which identify examples of best practice and support an accurate self-evaluation process, with associated development plans.
- Ensure that all staff responsible for the delivery of training are competent and confident to deliver functional skills to enable learners to achieve their learning goals, including the literacy and numeracy skills that support higher-level workplace skill development.
- Swiftly implement a succession plan for the company by establishing a senior management structure with clearly defined areas of operational and quality improvement responsibility.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Success rates and the proportion of learners who gain their qualifications within the planned duration of their training on child development and well-being workplace learning programmes are excellent. Achievement by the small number of learners on service enterprise programmes is also very good, with all learners achieving their qualifications in 2011/12. Success rates for the few learners on business, administration and law programmes require improvement. ▪ Success rates on advanced health and social care programmes in 2011/12 were close to the national average and require further improvement. Success rates on intermediate health and social care programmes in 2011/12 were inadequate and the proportion of these learners who achieved their qualifications within the planned duration of their programmes was low. ▪ Outcomes for Foundation Learning programmes in 2011/12 were inadequate. ▪ The provider's own data for the first eight months of the current academic year show considerable improvement in success rates in all apprenticeships, workplace learning health and social care courses and Foundation Learning programmes. The large majority of current learners on all programmes make good progress towards their learning outcomes, relative to their starting point. ▪ There are no significant differences in success rates for different groups of learners. ▪ Learners demonstrate a wide range of good care and personal skills. They exhibit improved care practice as a result of their training, for example, protecting service users from pressure sores through a greater understanding of how anatomy and physiology links to care practice. 	

They understand clearly the impact of their work in care settings. Learners develop good communication skills and confidence at work.

- Learners achieve an appropriate range of relevant additional qualifications that enhance their self-confidence and career aspirations well. For example, most learners successfully complete courses in manual handling, first aid and administration of medications. Learners develop appropriate skills in English and mathematics for their job roles and to meet the requirements of their qualifications.
- Many learners progress to sustained employment, higher-level qualifications or supervisory work roles. Employers value the skills and understanding that learners gain and the contribution that learners make to their businesses.
- Learners have a good understanding of health and safety topics and the need to follow safe working practices in potentially dangerous work settings, including lone working and managing bio-hazardous materials.
- Learners adequately understand their rights and responsibilities and demonstrate appropriate respect and behaviour towards each other and the vulnerable service users in their care.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, reflecting the fall in success rates in 2011/12, particularly in the delivery of English, mathematics and ICT skills.
- Most assessors and employers use their extensive vocational experience well in guiding and supervising learners to develop good care skills. Many employers support learning effectively through a range of additional relevant training on topics such as dementia awareness, substance misuse and first aid at work. However, not all employers are sufficiently involved in planning to coordinate workplace activities with the programme requirements.
- All teaching, learning and assessment for health and social care programmes is delivered in the workplace. In better coaching sessions assessors use a range of methods to provide clear, strong links between theory topics and learners' care practice and experiences.
- In less effective coaching sessions the more-able learners comfortably complete their allocated tasks and assignments without sufficient additional further challenge to maintain their motivation and extend their learning. Few assessors use ICT well to support their learning and develop higher study skills.
- Formal progress reviews are effective in monitoring individual learners' progress, but focus on recording the completion of tasks and the achievement of units of qualifications with insufficient attention paid to recognising skills development and improved care practice.
- Most assessors use initial assessment accurately to identify learners' English and mathematics skills at the start of the programme; however, the results of assessment are not used well enough to plan individual support for learners, particularly those with lower levels of literacy skills.
- Verbal feedback following assessments provides clear detail about areas for improvement to help learners progress. However, written feedback is too often insufficiently detailed and specific to help learners understand what they need to do to improve. Few assessors have sufficient skills to accurately and confidently assess and support learners' development of English, mathematics and ICT skills beyond the minimum requirements of the framework requirements.
- Information, advice and guidance require improvement. Advice about the appropriate levels of programme at recruitment is adequate. A few learners are on a programme which does not meet their individual level of need and ability, at the insistence of their employer. The quality and amount of advice on future training and career guidance varies considerably across the provision. One-to-one coaching is sufficient to overcome barriers to learning, particularly for those who have been away from formal learning for many years.
- The promotion of equality and diversity requires improvement. Learners have a sufficient understanding and application of equality and diversity principles in their current work settings and for the groups of care service users that they support. However, few assessors reinforce and

extend learners understanding of broader diversity-related topics during workplace visits and formal reviews.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, managers have greatly improved the arrangements for data collection, analysis and use of management information to improve outcomes for learners. Leaders and managers use data effectively to monitor individual learners' progress and manage the individual performance of assessors and learners, which has led to clear improvement in the success rates in the first eight months of the current year.
- The provider has made a considerable investment in strengthening operational management: two additional assessor team managers have been appointed. However, the provider has not yet successfully implemented a succession plan that includes the full identification of the senior management structure and responsibilities. The senior leader of the organisation still holds responsibility for too many operational duties including the direct management of quality improvement and the management of the assessors' performance.
- After a continuous period of business growth, the provider has altered its strategic direction and now gives a much higher priority to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the provision in the current business plan. However, there are insufficiently specific, challenging targets and success milestones in key performance areas.
- Acacia has an effective process for the observation of teaching and learning; graded observations broadly reflect the commentary and result in appropriate actions for improvement. Based on the providers' own grade profile, the standard of teaching and assessment has risen significantly in the last year. However, training and development actions have not yet resulted in improved performance by a few assessors. Staff performance is regularly reviewed; however, annual appraisals do not place sufficient weight on the results of graded observations when assessing the effectiveness of each assessor.
- Managers have significantly improved the self-assessment process. The current report accurately identifies issues that affect learning and has recently led to the agreement of clear, measurable, time-bound improvement targets. Acacia appropriately gathers learners' views at different stages of the learning programme; however, the questions asked are insufficiently probing and do not generate sufficient critical comments to bring about improvement. Response rates to annual surveys from employers are low.
- The planning for the introduction of functional skills delivery has been slow. Managers have only recently identified their staff's levels of competence with functional skills, and a programme of formal training has begun for the majority of assessors. However, several staff have low levels of English and mathematics qualifications and skills and most staff lack confidence when dealing with functional skills within the learning programme. Most staff also have low skills and confidence in using ICT and they do not promote effective research and independent learning skills to learners.
- The provider has very strong relationships with employers, leading to agreed flexible arrangements for training and assessment that suit the needs of the learners and businesses. Training programmes are adapted effectively to meet the training needs of each employer's workforce ensuring different sources of funding are utilised well. Acacia staff have a particularly good understanding of the care sector's training requirements and expectations.
- Acacia has a very detailed equality and diversity policy and action plan containing objectives and monitoring measures for the continuous promotion of equality; however, no formal targets are set up for these. The equality and diversity committee effectively reviews issues such as the additional learning needs of learners and the achievement analysis by different groups of learners. No significant differences in outcomes exist between different groups of learners. Although the learners' understanding of equality and diversity is robust, assessors miss opportunities to develop this knowledge further in the course of workplace visits.

- The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. The safeguarding policy is extensive and it is updated regularly in order to reflect any changes in legislation. Staff receive comprehensive annual training on safeguarding matters. Appropriately trained staff carry out suitable health and safety audits ensuring learners are based in safe environments.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Acacia Training Ltd			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships	Other work-based learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	3

Provider details

Acacia training Ltd	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: n/a
	Part-time: 1,844
Managing director	Victoria Francis
Date of previous inspection	May 2010
Website address	www.acaciatraining.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	135	N/A	40	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age								
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	35	847	10	655	0	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
N/A								
Number of community learners								
N/A								
Number of employability learners								
N/A								
Funding received from								
Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ nil 								

Additional socio-economic information

Acacia Training Ltd recruits apprentices from across a wide range of backgrounds onto training programmes that are delivered across diverse parts of England from major cities through to rural counties.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Gerard McGrath HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the managing director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject area listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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