

A4e

Re-inspection monitoring visit report

Unique reference number: 50083

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Last day of inspection: 18 September 2013

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Published date	Not published
Inspection Number	422186

Re-inspection Monitoring Visit: Main Findings

Context and focus of visit

A4e provides employability training in a number of community venues across England and in seven centres in Stockton, Darlington, Grimsby, Sheffield, Nottingham, West Bromwich and Brixton. The company also provides apprenticeship programmes mainly in the North West, North East and Yorkshire and Humberside. Sixty staff are involved in employability training, 61 staff are responsible for various aspects of providing classroom courses, and 43 staff have responsibility for all aspects of apprenticeship programmes. Twenty seven staff have responsibility for compliance, quality assurance and improvement activities. An executive director leads A4e's Learning and Education division; a director who is responsible for the leadership and management of the provision supports her.

At the last inspection in February 2013, A4e's overall effectiveness was judged inadequate. At the inspection, overall outcomes for learners required improvement and apprentices' outcomes were inadequate. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment required improvement; the effectiveness of leadership and management was inadequate. Three subject areas were inspected. The provision in health and social care, and child development and wellbeing and playwork, employability training, and administration were judged to require improvement. This report focuses on the themes explored during the visit.

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

What progress has A4e made to improve self-assessment and improvement planning?

Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, A4e's self-assessment arrangements were ineffective. Neither of the two self-assessment reports, one which focused on employability and the other on apprenticeship programmes, was sufficiently self-critical, and did not identify underperformance adequately. The action plans did not focus sufficiently on those areas where improvements were needed.

Since the inspection, A4e has appointed a head of quality and compliance to lead quality improvement activity, including the self-assessment process and the production of the self-assessment report. A significant amount of work has been carried out to improve these areas. All managers and many staff have been involved in the revised self-assessment process that has contributed well to a shared view about the need for improvements. Learners' and employers' views are sought to inform the self-assessment process through questionnaires. The self-assessment report is very clear, detailed, self-critical and links well to the inspection findings. It has identified most areas for improvement; A4e has a good knowledge of what it needs to do to improve. The associated quality improvement plan is well structured and has appropriately prioritised actions for improvements. A4e monitors the

implementation of the action plan effectively. A4e has adequate capacity to improve; however, as the company recognises, the speed of improvement must increase significantly.

Outcomes for learners

What progress has been made in improving outcomes for learners on employability programmes?

Significant progress

At the last inspection, overall success rates for learners on employability training programmes were approaching the national average, and required improvement. Since the inspection, A4e has implemented a range of successful actions to improve outcomes significantly for these learners. These include much improved initial and diagnostic assessment to better identify learners' additional training and personal support needs, and the monitoring of learners' progress.

Data provided during the monitoring visit for the current year indicate significant improvements in success rates. Based on this data, since 2011/12, overall success rates have improved by 10 percentage points to 83%. Success rates for learners on retailing and wholesaling have improved by 12 percentage points and for learners on Preparation for Life and Work the improvement in success rates has been 25 percentage points. Success rates for learners on health and social care courses are now high at 92%. Success rates for entry level learners have improved to 88%, for foundation learners to 85% and for intermediate learners to 70%. However, as A4e recognises, the rate of improvements on some specific courses are not good enough, such as learners on agriculture, horticulture and animal care courses.

What progress has been made to improve apprentices' success rates?

Insufficient progress

At the last inspection, success rates for apprentices were inadequate as they had been for many years. Since the inspection, A4e has taken a number of actions in order to improve outcomes, including increased monitoring of apprentices' progress and better monitoring of staff workload. However, the actions and interventions have not been effective; A4e has made insufficient progress to improve apprentices' success rates. The information available during the monitoring visit indicates a significant number of apprentices have not completed their courses. Since the inspection, success rates within the planned time on most courses have sharply declined and many apprentices are very unlikely to complete within the planned time. A significant number of apprentices are on a learning-break and it is unclear when or whether they will continue and complete their training programmes.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

What progress has A4e made in improving teaching, learning and assessment? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment required improvement. In particular, programmes did not engage, challenge or stimulate learners and the initial assessment results were not used effectively to plan learning.

Since the inspection, A4e has made sufficient progress to improve this area. It has taken a range of initiatives to develop the knowledge, understanding and practices of tutors, trainers and assessors to improve their teaching and training. Most tutors have attended training sessions to help them to deliver training which engages, stimulates and challenges learners more effectively. A clearer process to ensure initial assessment is better-used to plan individual learning has been developed and is at the advanced stages of implementation. Staff, with more effective practices, mentor tutors who need to improve their teaching and coaching. The actions have contributed to the improved learner outcomes on employability programmes. Trainers and assessors are allocated a smaller number of apprentices to improve their training and support. However, this strategy has not been sufficient to improve apprentices' outcomes. A4e is developing a system to enable all staff to access good learning resources at training venues. However, the access to information and learning technology and innovative use of ILT is not consistent across all venues.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

What progress has been made to improve the rigour and impact of the process for observing teaching, learning and assessment? Reasonable progress

At the last inspection, the observations of teaching, learning and assessment were insufficiently rigorous. The associated staff-development arrangements were not effective and did not improve the quality of teaching, training and learning. Observers identified very few areas for improvement and the grades awarded for the observed sessions were generous. Since the inspection, A4e has made sufficient progress in improving the observation of teaching and learning process. The process has been substantially revised in line with the inspection's recommendations. Staff who are responsible for observation of teaching, learning and assessment have received training in the new process and accompanying documentation. Joint observations and moderation meetings are beginning to improve the consistency and accuracy of the grades given to teaching and training sessions. Observers now have a better focus on improving the quality of learning. An extensive programme of staff training and development is being implemented and aimed at improving the quality of training and meeting learners' individual needs. The arrangement is developed to link the results of observations to staff development and the performance-

management system. For example, performance developments identified during the lesson-observation process are included in individual staff appraisal.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

What developments have taken place to improve the quality improvement arrangements? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection, A4e's arrangements for quality improvement were inadequate. The overall approach to quality improvement was not comprehensive, systematic or part of a routine improvement cycle.

Since the inspection, A4e has made sufficient improvements in this area. It has restructured and merged the quality assurance, compliance, and quality improvement functions; a newly appointed quality manager now leads the section. Many of the quality improvement processes have been revised, developed further, and are being implemented. A4e has redefined the roles and responsibilities for training staff in relation to quality assurance and improvement policies and procedures. A detailed schedule of quality improvement activities has been produced to ensure that all staff are clear about when quality improvement processes take place. An extensive programme of staff training and development and support is being implemented to ensure staff are clear about what is expected of them. Internal verification arrangements have been improved. However, some aspects of the quality arrangements have not been fully implemented. For example, the revised arrangements for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment have not been fully implemented. Weaknesses in the planning, progress monitoring and recording of some learners' training still remain.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

What progress has A4e made to improve the use and analysis of management information? **Reasonable progress**

At the last inspection, accurate and timely information and data on learners were not available. Staff did not fully use data to identify underperformance and those learners at the risk of not achieving.

Since the inspection, A4e has made sufficient progress to improve this area. It has developed an effective management-information system. Staff appropriately monitor most aspects of the provision. Better use is made of the information by staff to evaluate learners' progress and achievement rates. Senior managers and staff have good access to a wide range of relevant information about the performance levels, including the results of the visits of the quality team to different training venues. For example, reports on the results of the observations of teaching, learning and assessment sessions are analysed by the learning and development group to plan

staff development activities. Managers use information about staff workload to evaluate barriers to improvement. A4e acknowledges that it needs to develop and use the management-information system better to improve the whole learner journey and to plan more effectively the programmes and the resources so that it can improve the experience of all learners.

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