

Omega Training Services Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		27–31 January 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Outcomes for learners are good; most success rates are high and learners develop very good occupational, personal, learning and analytical skills.
- It provides very good support and care for learners, with training advisers instilling high expectations for individuals to achieve.
- Training advisers provide very effective coaching for learners on the children and young people's workforce (CYPW) and health and social care programmes.
- Highly effective partnerships and working relationships with employers support learners particularly well.
- Training advisers provide highly effective workshops and independent study projects that promote equality and diversity very well.
- A good range of additional qualifications for learners, such as paediatric first aid, food preparation and manual handling, enhance learners' employability skills.
- Managers lead and manage growth well, to meet the expanding needs of employers and their learners.
- Extensive staff development has improved the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates for workplace learners are low.
- Training advisers are not all confident in using questioning effectively.
- Numeracy and literacy exercises and examples do not always link effectively to the learners' everyday work.
- Observations of teaching, learning and assessment do not identify existing good practice to ensure that it can be shared effectively, or to find common areas for improvement.
- Self-assessment does not sufficiently explore strengths and areas for improvement at the level of the curriculum areas.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates for workplace learners by ensuring that their progress is assessed on a regular basis.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring all training advisers are confident in using questioning effectively to extend learners' knowledge and understanding; and by developing examples that are more relevant, with exercises in numeracy and literacy linked to the learners' job roles.
- Fully establish the new programme of observations of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that existing good practice is widely shared, and common weaker aspects influence future staff development.
- Further, develop the self-assessment processes, to ensure managers identify and report in sufficient detail on the strengths and areas for improvement in the curriculum areas.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Overall, the proportion of learners who completed apprenticeships in 2013 was high, and well above the 2013 national average for similar providers at all levels. This followed a dip in performance in 2012, although the proportion completing was still above the national average for similar providers. However, 2013 pass rates were low for the small number of learners aged 16 to 18, particularly on advanced level apprenticeships, where they were below the national average.
- The proportion of learners achieving their apprenticeship by their planned end date is very high and significantly above the national average for similar providers.
- A high proportion of learners achieve their functional English and mathematics skills qualifications at intermediate level. For learners on Skills for Life programmes in 2012/13, overall achievements were in line with the national rate, which is high. The proportion of Skills for Life learners achieving their qualification by the planned end date is significantly above the national average. However, for a small number of learners on workplace learning programmes overall success rates are significantly lower when compared nationally to similar providers.
- Most current learners are making good progress in all programme areas and are currently on target to achieve their qualification by their planned end date.
- There are no significant achievement gaps between different groups of learners. The success rate for learners identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high, and well above the national average for similar providers. Unemployed learners have the opportunity to gain apprenticeship qualifications, enhancing their social and economic well-being.
- Learners enjoy their learning and find sessions interesting and informative. They develop good workplace skills and improve their self-confidence and competence in the workplace after completing their learning programmes.
- A large number of learners achieve additional qualifications, including health and safety, first aid, manual handling and paediatric first aid. Employers offer learners undertaking care programmes a good range of additional courses as part of their job role, which supports achievement of their course effectively. These include specialist courses such as dementia awareness and caring for disabled service users, as well as health and safety, all of which contribute to enhancing and improving their workplace skills and specialist knowledge.

- Learners' development of functional skills, English and mathematics, is good across all programme areas. A significant number of learners progress to higher-level qualifications. Many learners gain promotion within their employment, taking on additional responsibility.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
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- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and contribute very effectively to the high success rates and the good progress made by most learners. Training advisers plan learning sessions thoroughly and use a good range of activities and resources skilfully to motivate learners and contribute to their success. They use their expertise very effectively to ensure learners enjoy learning, make good progress and improve their skills and abilities. Training advisers have a good understanding of the learners' individual needs and interests; they are well qualified and have a good range of professional relevant experience.
- Training advisers provide learners with very good levels of support and encouragement to take increased responsibility for their own learning, enabling learners to apply theories to practice effectively; for example, the impact of personalisation in care settings and differentiation in educational settings. Coaching for learners on the CYPW and health and care programmes is very effective. However, for a few learners the use of questioning to test their knowledge is not always rigorous enough. Training advisers use technology effectively to support learning.
- Training advisers develop good partnerships with employers and have high expectations of learners. They make sure learners receive very effective encouragement to improve their professional practice and explore career opportunities. Training advisers provide highly effective workshops to help learners improve their functional skills and prepare for examinations. This ensures learners gain increased self-confidence and remain on target to complete their qualification. However, a few apprentices on health and social care programmes are unaware of these workshops.
- Learners receive a thorough and effective induction to Omega and this ensures that they understand all of the elements of their training programme. All learners receive a thorough initial assessment, which helps to set individual targets and learning plans. Training advisers help learners to identify the most effective methods of learning to best suit their needs and preferences; for example, the choice of keeping either an electronic or paper-based portfolio with options to record guided discussions digitally.
- The vast majority of training advisers ensure learners have clear and realistic achievement goals, including personal targets to support wider interests and career ambitions. However, a few learners on the teaching assistant programmes have targets which are too general and insufficiently specific. Training advisers encourage learners to choose independent study projects, which they complete as they await the next visit from their training adviser.
- Assessment is thorough and well planned. Verbal feedback to learners is constructive and supportive; the vast majority of written feedback contains a good level of detail which enables learners to reflect on their performance and improve their knowledge and skills. Training advisers monitor learners' progress thoroughly and make sure they understand how well they are doing. However, a few learners on business and administration courses are unclear what they have to do to complete their qualification.
- Arrangements for helping learners to improve their use of mathematics and English integrate well with programmes and this enables learners to make good progress by gaining confidence and very useful skills. However, for a few learners on the teaching assistant programmes, tutors do not contextualise functional skills lessons well enough. Learners and training advisers make good use of a specialist functional skills team who provide good support and ensure standards of teaching and learning remain high. High quality individual workbooks help learners make good levels of progress.

- Staff provide very effective advice and guidance, which ensures learners are well informed about options for further study available to them at all stages in their learning. Training advisers and employers provide learners with good advice, which enables them to plan and develop wider interests. Employers receive regular and frequent information about learners' progress and they help training advisers plan for the next stage of the learners' programme.
- Training advisers promote equality and diversity thoroughly when they meet with learners. This ensures learners have a good understanding of key principles of equality and diversity and they demonstrate this in their written work and in the workplace. Health and social care and CYPW learners have a very good understanding of the importance of ensuring vulnerable people are adequately safeguarded.

**Health and social care
Apprenticeships
19+ Learning programmes**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. This is reflected in the high numbers of apprentices completing successfully. Learners make good progress and the vast majority of apprentices meet their completion date, however for the small number of workplace learners success rates were low.
- Learners benefit from well-qualified and occupationally competent training advisers who provide effectively planned and paced activities helping learners to link theory to care practice very efficiently. Learners produce a good standard of written and practical work and have good analytical and critical thinking skills, helping them to reflect on case studies and their own care practice when caring for individual service users in their own or care home environment. Learners are particularly knowledgeable about caring for service users who have dementia, mental health illnesses or autism.
- The majority of learners benefit from good quality teaching and support to help them develop their English and mathematics skills. Vocational sessions and additional workshops help to improve learners' knowledge and achievement of functional skills qualifications. However, not all learners are aware of the additional support sessions arranged in the workplace
- Training advisers make good use of information learning technology during assessment sessions which enables learners to focus on written information and knowledge applied to workplace scenarios. For example, learners used the internet effectively to research and use safeguarding information when considering how to safeguard service users and themselves effectively when working in care settings.
- Learners develop good levels of self-confidence to undertake their work and develop good communication skills. Training advisers provide high levels of guidance, support and maintain regular contact with learners. They make good progress, developing improved levels of confidence when completing written work and improving their knowledge of good care practice, such as health and safety legislation.
- Training advisers use learners' initial assessment outcomes well to identify starting points accurately and to plan learning effectively. They provide extra sessions when learners require additional learning support, which helps them to make good progress and overcome barriers to learning.
- Training advisers plan assessment of learning in the workplace very well; learners make good progress and understand gaps in their knowledge. Training advisers test learners' knowledge through probing questions and written work which challenge and extend learners' knowledge and ability to apply theory to professional care practice. Training advisers provide regular, concise and clear verbal feedback.

- Learners benefit from good advice and guidance through regular assessment visits and good support, all of which enable them to understand what they need to do next to complete their course and progress their careers
- Learners develop a good understanding of equality and diversity and use their knowledge well to consider how best to care for and respect individuals wishes, for example by analysing case studies focusing on abuse in a service user's own home, and subsequent deeper discussions on statutory and care procedures.
- Learners demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding legislation. Learners are fully aware of the importance of adopting safe practice when caring for service users and safeguarding themselves.

Early years and play work
Apprenticeships
19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good and this generally mirrors the good outcomes in 2012/13 for childcare training. Learners on the children and young people's workforce qualification successfully improve their ability to work with teenagers in residential care homes.
- The majority of learners are now making good progress. However, there is a significant number of learners for whom staff turnover has had a large impact on their initial progress. The standard of work in many portfolios is high.
- Learners develop good employability and social skills. Many learners work in very challenging environments but the training has enabled them to gain the confidence and the skills necessary to support and work safely with the young people in their care. For example, one learner kept himself, his colleague and another young person safe when a young person with a history of violence tried to attack his colleague.
- Training advisers coach learners very well in one-to-one sessions. They plan learning well, using a good varieties of activities. Training advisers use questioning very effectively to develop learners' ideas and encourage further learning. They use laptops well to support learning, for example, as a word processor to complete and make additions to written evidence or for quizzes to stimulate learning. Learners value the functional skills workshops as well as the workshops for the many additional qualifications that they take.
- Assessment is thorough, with detailed learner assessment plans that identify what to assess next. Training advisers' feedback is good, with observation reports that clearly identify what each learner has achieved and what is still required.
- The regular learner progress reviews are good. Targets are clear and supportive of learning, and the reviews include records of completed work. Learners clearly understand their progress, and training advisers keep employers well informed.
- Training advisers support learners very well; they are available over the telephone or by email between planned meetings. Assessors normally visit on a fortnightly basis. In addition, learners, employers and colleagues provide very effective support; exhibiting a genuine interest in their progress.
- Learners complete an effective initial assessment and diagnostic test to determine their starting points and this guides their functional skills and any additional learning needs.
- Information, advice and guidance are effective. Assessors discuss opportunities with learners regularly and help find information to assist in career plans. Omega offers workshops in functional skills and other topics, to support learners' achievement.

- Training advisers promote equality and diversity very well. In addition to completing the mandatory unit on equality and diversity, learners receive a bi-monthly newsletter, which includes equality and diversity issues. Employers often read these newsletters, discussing their contents with learners to raise their awareness of equality and diversity matters. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity issue is good.

Training to provide learning support
Apprenticeships
19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, as reflected in the high proportion of learners achieving their qualifications. Training advisers demonstrate high, though realistic, expectations of learners and use these effectively to motivate and encourage them to achieve their learning goals. Learners receive good support from training advisers and from colleagues in their workplace settings. They benefit from additional knowledge sessions when they need extra support to complete their assessments. Procedures to monitor learners' progress are robust, leading to individualised, specific action points to address any gaps in learning and achievement.
- Training advisers plan learning very effectively, meeting learners' individual learning needs well. They are well qualified and experienced, using teaching and learning methods, resources and specialist knowledge effectively to promote and support learning. They make good links between theory and practice, for example, relating safeguarding and health and safety procedures to learners' workplace settings. Training advisers monitor learning regularly. However, they are over-reliant on using closed questions to check learners' understanding. They promote independent learning effectively by signposting learners to internet-based resources, which extend their learning.
- Initial assessment is effective enabling timely identification of learners' additional learning support needs and initial target setting. Training advisers review learners' progress regularly and set revised targets, timing assessments to meet individual learners' needs well. They use assessment activities effectively to secure learners' progress and achievement.
- Feedback to learners on assessments is good. Training advisers use verbal feedback to motivate learners and to provide information about their progress and achievement. Most written feedback is detailed, identifying key strengths, developmental points and, where appropriate, specific action points to advise learners on how to address any gaps in assessment evidence. However, in a few cases, written feedback is less effective, confirming achievement and key strengths without identifying developmental points.
- Information, advice and guidance are good. The provider has good links with employers who signpost learners to their training opportunities. Learners benefit from a detailed induction, which includes information about future progression opportunities.
- Learners have good opportunities to develop their English, mathematics and information and communication technology skills. One learner described how she has learned to illustrate the process of division by using differently coloured counters, enabling her to demonstrate this successfully to the pupils she supports in her workplace. Training advisers do not contextualise functional skills assessment activities sufficiently to the vocational area.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good, with very strong promotion of inclusion and inclusive practice on the programmes. Learners demonstrate good awareness of special educational needs and are able to describe confidently the strategies they use to enable the pupils they support to participate fully in lessons. Learners also demonstrate good awareness of the importance of challenging discriminatory behaviour in their workplace settings, for example, by challenging children's abusive use of racist language.

Administration and Business management Apprenticeships 19+ Learning programmes

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment on all business courses are good, resulting in high overall framework success rates for apprenticeship programmes in this area, which are well above national averages. The majority of current learners are on target to achieve within their planned timescales. The standard of learners' work is high.
- Training advisers are very committed and enthusiastic and have high expectations of learners. They have good recent vocational experience, which they share with learners. Learners respond to this positively and are very motivated to succeed.
- Training advisers plan and prepare their sessions thoroughly to meet individual learners' needs. Advisers know their learners well and ensure that sessions address their employment situations and personal circumstances carefully.
- Assessment practices are good and training advisers use a wide range of effective assessment strategies, which stimulate interest and engage learners successfully. Training advisers check understanding in a variety of ways, though questions are not always challenging enough. Progress reviews are regular and thorough and learners know what to do to improve.
- Learners receive good verbal feedback and encouragement, as well as helpful and constructive written comments, on how to improve. Training advisers talk to employers to ensure learners have good opportunities to help them gather good evidence for their portfolios.
- Learners are encouraged to relate theory to practice very effectively. Training advisers ensure that learners understand how closely academic work links to their employment practices, enabling them to make good progress in their careers. In a training company, for example, business and administration learners reinforced their understanding of how to maintain confidentiality of company records; while in a law firm, business management learners developed effective negotiating skills.
- Support for learners is good, ensuring they are on the right level of course. Learners receive good personal and specialist advice throughout their learning. The company provides good specialist resources, which help learners develop their knowledge and understanding through independent research, complementing and extending the learning that takes place with training advisers. Training advisers, as well employers, managers and workplace colleagues, support learners very well on a wide range of issues.
- The development of English is very good and learners make good progress in written and spoken English, applying their skills in the workplace confidently and correctly. Learners' development of communications technology skills is good, while development in numeracy is satisfactory but requires closer links with employment practice to become more effective.
- Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Induction helps learners to consider different aspects. Questions in reviews and evidence from the provider's learning resources reinforce understanding of equality and diversity issues effectively. Learners understand health and safety issues well, and know who to approach if they have any safeguarding concerns.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. Omega sets ambitious targets for growth in the number of employers and learners and for apprenticeship completion rates. The regularly updated business plan shows some notable successes against these targets. For example, in the month

before inspection Omega considerably exceeded its target to beat national minimum performance levels by ten percentage points.

- The company has recruited several new members of staff, and created new posts to respond effectively to the demand for new areas of training from their employers, and to improve the level of learner support and the quality of teaching. This additional resource has markedly improved completion rates and communication with employers. The monitoring of learners' progress is particularly effective. Learners at risk of not completing receive intensive support in the form of additional assessment visits, individual coaching and teaching.
- Following the previous inspection, Omega arranged extensive staff development to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, drawing on a good range of external advice and resources. New training advisers have a supportive and well-structured induction to enable them to take up their role quickly and effectively. Graded observations of teaching and learning inform the annual staff reviews and the arrangements to deal with the few instances of continuing underperformance.
- Managers record graded observations carefully, and their evaluative comments help training advisers to improve their performance. However, the current system is relatively new and does not yet include any moderated or paired observations to promote consistency. It does not identify good practice or common areas for improvement to help plan staff development activities, or identify where peer observation would benefit a training adviser.
- Quality improvement has developed considerably since the previous inspection. The provider uses management information well and involves all staff. Staff recognise the impact of their role on the experience of the learners and look for ways to improve, which they discuss in the weekly team meetings. Regular employer telephone surveys ensure that their voice strongly influences quality improvement. The most recent self-assessment report is sufficiently evaluative although it does not identify strengths and areas for improvement in individual sector subject areas sufficiently.
- Working relationships with employers are exceptionally good, which ensures the study programmes meet their needs well. Employers particularly appreciate Omega's flexibility and responsiveness in supporting learners and their needs. The introduction of new subject areas such as team leadership and customer service to meet the needs of both existing and new employers has been particularly well led and managed. Employers integrate the training they provide into the overall learner programme to provide a coherent developmental experience for the learner. They speak very positively about the new skills and knowledge that learners gain during the programme. For example, one manager of a residential care home described how much better prepared learners are at resident meal times so that they are able to support their residents immediately. Employers enthusiastically nominate their learners for the established 'learner of the year' award, which learners and employers value, as a means to celebrate success.
- Staff promote equality and diversity very well in taught sessions and through the programme of projects that learners complete between review visits. Teachers use well-chosen case studies and their good understanding of the specific employment context where the learners work to explore and extend the learners' understanding of the importance of treating people fairly and the legislation that underpins their work. Omega models its strong commitment to equalities in its own staff recruitment.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough and managers review these regularly. A senior designated officer provides annual update training for all staff. Safeguarding is a regular topic for learners, beginning in induction with an introduction to categories of abuse and the accompanying signs that might indicate a child or vulnerable adult is at risk. Learners are issued with personal safety alarms at induction. They feel safe and have an extensive understanding of safety in the workplace. The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Omega Training Services Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	3	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and Social Care	2
Early Years and Playwork	2
Training to Provide Learning Support	2
Administration	2
Business Management	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0							
	Part-time: 1,285							
CEO	Maureen Smith							
Date of previous inspection	November 2011							
Website address	www.omega-training-services.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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of traineeships	16-19			19+		Total		
	N/A			N/A		N/A		
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	20	439	4	287	N/A	N/A		
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	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:	■ None							

Contextual information

Omega Training Services (Omega) is a limited company and operates from its offices in Birmingham and Wakefield. The company has been involved in workplace training, mainly in the care of the elderly, since 1996. The company currently works actively with 173 employers across 211 sites nationally. All learners are employed. Omega currently employs 48 members of staff excluding the four directors.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Deavon Baker-Oxley HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the Operations 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 relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas 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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