

ACE Training and Consultancy Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		10–13 June 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
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:

- Success rates are improving, with many learners making particularly good progress from their initial starting points.
- Learners develop excellent vocational skills, social skills and improve their confidence.
- Many learners make very good progress into construction-related apprenticeships, or into further education or employment.
- Enthusiastic and knowledgeable tutors provide good teaching and learning and have high aspirations for what learners can achieve.
- Learners benefit from working in small groups where academic and pastoral support is particularly effective. Learners with specific needs are supported well and achieve their qualifications.
- ACE Training has strong, ambitious leaders who have made the improvements required at the previous inspection.
- Managers have developed particularly productive partnerships to meet the needs of learners and employers.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Success rates require further improvement across all courses; too many learners leave their programmes early.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not yet outstanding and in a minority of sessions more able learners are insufficiently challenged.
- Initial advice and guidance are not used effectively to identify the support learners may need to understand the demands and structure of their programme.
- Although learners improve their English and mathematics well during training, insufficient emphasis is placed on these subjects during vocational training sessions.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates for all courses, with a particular focus on the level 1 construction crafts diploma, ensuring it mirrors the progress made in Foundation English and mathematics.
- Reduce the number of learners who leave the programmes early by using initial assessments and progress reviews to more effectively identify potential barriers to learning.
- Ensure tutors make better use of the vocational context and the naturally occurring opportunities in practical training sessions to promote and develop learners’ understanding and practical application of English and mathematics.
- Further refine measures to collect and analyse learners’ performance data to identify those at risk, to identify any underperforming groups, and to further inform quality improvement action planning.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learners’ success in attaining their qualifications requires improvement. Overall success rates have improved and are now around the national rate for similar provision. Increasing numbers of learners attain their foundation level English and mathematics qualifications; however, the proportion who successfully complete the level 1 diploma in construction requires improvement, and remains stubbornly below the national rate. Too many learners leave the programmes early without achieving all of their planned qualifications. ▪ The progress that retained learners make from their starting points is good, many coming to ACE Training with poor experiences of their previous education together with low expectations and self-esteem. They gain confidence and improved social skills, increasing their opportunities for employment. Progression into employment and/or further education is good, with increasing numbers of learners progressing to construction apprenticeships within ACE Training, enabling them to continue with qualification aims started whilst in their foundation training. ▪ The majority of learners develop good practical skills in either bricklaying or carpentry, with many exceeding the requirements of their qualification. They become adept at using hand tools, laying and setting out, and they maintain high expectations and challenge themselves to achieve high standards. However, learners’ written work does not always match the standard of their practical work. ▪ Current learners are making good progress in the development of their English and mathematics, and success rates have improved significantly; however, these skills are frequently developed out of context with their other studies, limiting further progress. ▪ Learners develop a high regard for health and safety, safe working practices and the wearing of personal protective equipment; they have the confidence to challenge the transgression of workshop safety standards by fellow learners or visitors. ▪ Attendance and punctuality are generally good with learners’ performance now more closely monitored. Learners actively participate in learning sessions and enjoy their training. 	
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, as reflected in the good progress made by most learners and the improving success rates on most courses. ACE Training has recently increased the number of teaching staff; all staff are knowledgeable and vocationally 	

experienced. Tutors are enthusiastic about the construction industry as a good place to work and learn, and they build very positive relationships with learners.

- Lessons and workshop sessions are constructively planned, progressively developing skills with clear evidence of learning at an appropriate level. Tutors involve the learners well in discussions and good use is made of group work and peer support. Checking for learning is frequent and thorough, and learners comment that they enjoy both theory and workshop sessions developing their vocational skills, and gaining in confidence and competence.
- Resources to support learning are good and provide an appropriate learning environment with a strong focus on recycling and re-using materials. High quality written handouts and workbooks encourage learners to take pride in their work. Workshops are well stocked and resourced, with high quality industry-standard equipment such as hand and power tools. All training areas are well organised, spacious and well-lit. Posters and displays of learners' work provide good celebration of the industry and of learners' successes and progression. These are used well, along with prompt cards of technical terms and phrases, to promote discussion and understanding.
- Learners develop good basic hand skills and have a good awareness of safe working practices. Health and safety are appropriately reinforced within the training centre and particularly in workshop areas. All learners observed were correctly dressed in personal protective equipment, and demonstrated a good awareness of hazards. They systematically report incidents and act promptly to minimise risk to themselves and others.
- Tutors carefully demonstrate the correct way to produce and develop work pieces and, as a consequence, learners are quickly and successfully able to attempt complex activities in bricklaying or carpentry. The tutors adopt a facilitative style, encouraging and assisting learners in the development of skills and competence. Good working relationships are encouraged and developed; more advanced learners support and encourage less able learners, to their mutual benefit.
- Feedback to learners is supportive. Learners are very clear about what it is they need to do to improve the quality of their work. The verbal feedback in practical sessions is particularly helpful, however, the written comments in portfolios and on written assessments are often insufficiently detailed.
- The promotion of English and mathematics is good. There are small-group discrete English and mathematics sessions for all foundation level learners. The classes are well structured and effectively develop understandings of spoken and written English and the practical application of number.
- Mathematics is routinely reinforced in workshop sessions with, for example, the measuring of component parts of wooden frames, and the calculation of angles. Brickwork learners use setting-out principles and routinely calculate areas, material requirements and convert between measuring systems. The use of written English is promoted in the learners' portfolio work where they are able to describe a practical task using correct spelling and grammar. However, tutors do not explain of the meaning and derivation of technical terms sufficiently with learners, and internet research is rarely used to explore the curiosities of trade-specific terminology.
- Initial assessment, advice and guidance require improvement. The induction of learners onto foundation programmes is thorough in most respects, but does not provide sufficient information about the requirements of their programme of study or the next steps in their education. All learners are interviewed, and tested appropriately for their abilities in English and mathematics. Information about learners' needs and skills is used in planning the individual learning programmes, lesson planning and monitoring progress at frequent reviews. However, staff have yet to use initial assessment information to improve retention and reduce the number of learners who leave the training early.
- During learners' induction and reviews of progress, staff effectively introduce aspects of equality and diversity. Learners are encouraged to consider topics such as gender and ethnicity within their subject area, and to enter into discussion and express their opinions. However, discussions

of diversity and sustainability in the construction industry are not routinely promoted during training sessions.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good and demonstrate an ambitious vision with high expectations of what learners can attain; this ambition contributes significantly to the improving success rates. Staff have a clear understanding of this well-articulated strategic vision and their role in bringing it to fruition, particularly in demonstrating high ambitions for what learners are able to achieve.
- The monitoring of learning and teaching is effective at improving the skills and competence of teachers. Frequent observations are closely linked to monthly one-to-one meetings between teachers and line managers, leading to well-planned personal development and supportive mentoring where needed.
- Investment in learning resources and in staff provides learners with well-equipped classrooms and workshops, together with sufficient staff to ensure a supportive learning environment in small classes. The company has invested well in information and communication technology resources in classrooms. A recent move to extend the provision into bench joinery has been supported by the purchase of industry-standard machinery housed in an appropriate workspace.
- Measures to collect and respond to learners' views are good, and responses to learners' views have included the construction of an outdoor rest area. Managers place a strong emphasis on sustainability and the environment, recycling and re-using materials where possible, and reducing waste wherever possible. Reduction of running costs, including energy consumption, has enabled greater investment in learning resources.
- Managers and staff have a good understanding of the actions necessary to improve the experiences and outcomes for learners. They have been successful in implementing many of the actions from the previous inspection, along with those identified in review meetings. Quality improvement planning promotes improvement; actions are evaluated on a monthly basis and challenging targets set. Self-assessment reporting is now more self-critical.
- Quality improvement has been informed well by data analysis over the past year. Analysis of retention, attendance, punctuality, and achievement rates, is routinely completed.
- Particularly productive partnerships and labour market intelligence are used well to meet the needs of learners and employers. The foundation programme is well designed, providing an engaging experience for learners with good opportunities for them to improve their employability skills. For those wishing to progress into construction the training provides effective pre-apprentice experiences closely matched to skills shortages identified by employers. Strong links with schools, local authorities, employers and trade organisations are particularly effective at providing work experience and real work tasks, some of which benefit local communities, for example rebuilding an allotment shed recently destroyed by fire.
- Equality and diversity are adequately promoted. ACE Training is an inclusive organisation that provides a welcoming and supportive learning environment. At progress reviews and in small group tutorials, tutors promote equality and diversity well; however, such discussions are not always effectively recorded. Opportunities to discuss diversity in vocational sessions are less well developed. Female learners and those from minority ethnic backgrounds are under represented in ACE Training and in the construction industry generally. Staff are aware of this and actively link with local schools to promote construction careers for all. There are too few female or minority ethnic learners to validate any analysis of achievement gaps. However, ACE Training only carries out limited analysis of the comparative performance of any particular groups of learners.
- ACE Training meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. All staff have received appropriate training and checks. There is a strong focus on health and safety. Learners feel safe

and behave well; for the small minority of learners who do not show the levels of respect expected of them, appropriate disciplinary procedures are in place.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

ACE Training and Consultancy Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Outcomes for learners	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Foundation English and mathematics	2

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full time 41							
Principal/CEO	Mr Adam Marsh							
Date of previous inspection	December 2012							
Website address	www.a-c-e-training.com							
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+
	16	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
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	Education Funding Agency (EFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None 							

Contextual information

ACE Training was established in August 2011, and is located on an industrial estate in Kidlington near Oxford. The company works closely with construction companies across Oxfordshire and surrounding counties. ACE Training provides Foundation English and mathematics programmes, within the context of construction, for unemployed school leavers. The programmes provide opportunities for learners to progress to construction apprenticeships also provided by ACE Training under a separate contract, and not included in this inspection. Around 42 learners are recruited annually, with an increasing number progressing to construction apprenticeships or other education and training. Most employment locally is in service industries; however, there has been an upturn in construction in recent months with an expansion in house building locally. Three owner directors have overall responsibility for the company with all aspects of the training provided within the training centre.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Barry Barrett-Mold

One lead and one additional inspector, 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 past 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 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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