

Acacia Training Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		29 September – 3 October 2014
<i>Overall effectiveness</i>	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-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 apprentices on health and social care courses, who represent the majority of apprentices, do not achieve well enough. There is too much difference between how well apprentices in different regions succeed
- a large majority of apprentices do not extend their skills in using English and mathematics beyond the levels to pass tests
- the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good or better. Not all trainers have sufficiently high expectations of apprentices and focus too much on apprentices passing their courses rather than on extending their knowledge and skills
- many trainers do not have sufficient experience or skills to teach key elements of using English and mathematics well
- leaders and managers have not improved apprentices' outcomes and the quality of training and assessment fast enough
- the implementation of Acacia Training Limited (Acacia)'s quality improvement arrangements has been ineffective. The self-assessment process has not identified the weaknesses in its provision
- Acacia does not meet the needs of apprentices and employers well enough, as the training fails to help apprentices to improve higher-level employability skills and vocational knowledge that they need to progress in their job roles.

This provider has the following strengths:

- trainers are very supportive and help apprentices to stay on their courses
- managers have good systems to monitor the progress of apprentices and use the information well to improve trainers' quality of work, which, in comparison with last year, has resulted in more apprentices completing their programmes successfully
- apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their clients safe.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the pace of improvements in apprentices' outcomes; take steps to ensure that more of them achieve their framework overall and within the planned time, especially for underperforming groups, by ensuring that:
 - trainers set and agree clear learning targets with apprentices, monitor their progress well against these targets and take well-planned actions to ensure that apprentices make good or better progress towards completing their qualifications
 - employers are involved fully in the apprentices' teaching, learning and assessment so that they can progress faster.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that all trainers:
 - share high expectations of what apprentices can achieve, in order to ensure that they make better progress in their learning
 - use individual teaching and coaching plans well to challenge apprentices to develop higher levels of employability and vocational skills beyond the levels that they had when they started on their programmes
 - have appropriate skills to develop apprentices' skills in English and mathematics, so that apprentices enhance their employability skills.
- Ensure that trainers use training resources well by:
 - ensuring that they can use electronic portfolios effectively, and can teach apprentices about using the electronics portfolio system well, in order that they develop good independent learning skills
 - providing apprentices with clear information about how to access relevant information productively from the internet, so that they can access reliable, good and relevant learning material efficiently.
- Completely revise, develop and implement the process for how apprentices are assessed; ensure assessment practices are always timely and robust, in order to improve the quality of apprentices' learning.
- Ensure that the well-designed framework for quality improvement is implemented and used effectively by all managers and trainers in order to increase the speed of improvements. Implement systematically the resulting action plans from all quality improvement activities to ensure consistently good or better provision for learners in all regions.
- Improve the quality of the provision and learners' outcomes through ensuring that the self-assessment report takes all information on performance and quality into account, is more self-critical and accurate and leads to a realistic and precise action plan that staff and managers implement fully and rigorously.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Success rates for apprentices are improving but are still not good enough. Almost all apprentices are on care programmes, with a few who are on business management courses. In 2012/13, the proportion of intermediate apprentices who completed improved but not to a high enough level. The proportion of advanced apprentices on care programmes, around 40% of apprentices, who completed successfully was too low. Acacia's own data for 2013/14 show a further improvement in apprentices' completion rates, and completion rates within the planned time. The apprentices at the time of the inspection are making reasonable progress considering their starting points.

Success rates for the very few apprentices on business management courses required improvement.

- Too many trainers do not broaden apprentices' knowledge and skills beyond the minimum level required to pass qualifications. Apprentices complete a wide range of employer-funded additional qualifications, such as dementia awareness, infection control and for end-of-life care. Only a minority of trainers build on these courses well enough to extend further the knowledge of apprentices and the standard of care which they offer clients.
- Most apprentices have many years experience of working as carers. When they produce written work, the standard is generally good. In their written work, they reflect on their practices and become more confident to discuss care-related matters, for example, by discussing care plans with their work colleagues and suggesting improvements to working practices in care homes.
- The development of apprentices' English and mathematics skills requires improvement. Based on Acacia's data, the proportion of apprentices who pass their functional skills successfully is good. However, the large majority of apprentices do not extend their skills in using English and mathematics beyond the levels required to pass the tests and do not develop to their potential.
- Managers and trainers have not been successful in ensuring that different groups of apprentices achieve equally well. For example, apprentices aged 16 to 18, male apprentices, and apprentices from African or Pakistani heritage are not as successful as others. The variations between apprentices' achievements vary too much across different geographical regions.
- Many apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and their clients safe. For example, in considering when to use bed guards for clients who are risks to themselves due to dementia. Apprentices show an acceptable understanding of individuals' dignity and rights.
- A reasonable proportion of apprentices who complete their qualifications successfully gain promotion to senior carer positions, progress to higher-level courses or carry out more demanding roles. They enjoy taking additional responsibility, for example as advisors on infection control.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Despite some improvements since the last inspection, the quality of training and assessment strategies and practices still requires improvement. As a result, outcomes are not yet good enough. The quality of training sessions in all regions and for all groups of apprentices is not consistently good or better. In a significant minority of sessions trainers do not set high enough expectations of the, often experienced, apprentices in the care sector. The progress of a number of apprentices has been slow due to staffing issues; recently, this has been resolved.
- Support for apprentices to stay on their programmes is good. Apprentices, who require additional support, for example to discuss any aspects of the course or to reschedule their meetings with trainers, are supported effectively by trainers. Trainers visit apprentices at times most convenient to them and their employers. They encourage apprentices to contact them in the ways which are most opportune to them, for instance, by email, telephone or text messages. They provide good advice when apprentices experience difficulties at work.
- Trainers plan sessions adequately for intermediate, advanced and higher apprentices to progress towards completing their qualifications. In the best sessions they discuss with apprentices how theory links to their work, for example to clients' care plans. However, too many trainers do not set clear objectives for the sessions and fail to plan for the best teaching approaches for individual learning. At the conclusion of the sessions, learners do not know well enough what they have learnt. Trainers do not set apprentices, especially advanced apprentices, sufficiently clear tasks and how to complete them.
- Trainers review apprentices' progress well towards completing their qualifications and what remains to be achieved. However, in most cases employers are not involved sufficiently with apprentices' progress reviews, in planning their training or assessment; consequently on- and

off-the-job training are not sufficiently coordinated and apprentices do not progress as well as they should do.

- Trainers have extensive experience of the care sector and use their experience well. For instance, they give examples of practices in different care homes or care settings. Around half of the apprentices use an electronic portfolio system, but many apprentices and not all trainers can use the system confidently; therefore, trainers cannot train apprentices well about using the system. Trainers provide apprentices with well-produced booklets, for example about infection control; however, these are not routinely used. Too many trainers ask apprentices to research the internet for information about what they need to learn without adequate guidance; this leads to apprentices using the internet unproductively.
- The quality of plans for individual learning is often unsatisfactory; they lack details about learning tasks and are not always complete. They do not include clear targets for learning or how employers can contribute to apprentices' training which leads to apprentices' slow progress. Acacia staff assess apprentices' initial starting points adequately, for example their skill levels in using English and mathematics. Trainers have a good knowledge of barriers to learning which apprentices may face but they do not always use this information regularly or well enough to plan individual apprentices' training.
- Trainers do not always use effective assessment practices. Written feedback on apprentices' work is often not detailed or useful for them to improve their work. Trainers rely too much on online testing, which does not challenge the more able apprentices. Checking the quality of apprentices' portfolios of work is not always quick enough. Trainers do not always check learning well during sessions, and as a result, they are not always aware of what skills apprentices have developed during each session.
- In the best sessions trainers encourage apprentices to use good levels of English and mathematics skills, for example when they write reports or plan weekly shift patterns. However, many trainers do not have the skills to explain well some elements of using English, such as sentence structure and punctuation, or percentages, proportions and ratios in mathematics and therefore cannot support apprentices to extend their English and mathematics skills well.
- The quality of information, advice and guidance which apprentices receive requires improvement. Acacia staff provide apprentices with a wide range of material when they start; however, trainers do not refer to and discuss this material during the sessions, and so apprentices do not see its relevance. Plans which apprentices should use to help them plan their progression are often incomplete and ineffective for planning apprentices' progression.
- Not all trainers discuss with apprentices in sufficient depth the fair treatment of individuals or how individual differences may influence working practices. They do not use naturally occurring opportunities to expand apprentices' knowledge of these topics. Trainers extend well apprentices' knowledge and understanding of their roles and responsibilities to maintain their own and the clients' safety.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Although some progress has been made on most of the key areas for improvement at the last inspection, progress has been too slow. Acacia has not made sufficient progress in improving outcomes and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. These were identified as key priorities at the last inspection and still require improvement. Managers have taken a number of successful actions, for example training and development of staff, that has resulted in more learners achieving their apprenticeships.
- A new management structure has improved the supervision and management of trainers who provide training nationally. The managing director and senior managers now have a clear strategic direction which is supported well by appropriate strategic objectives and targets. The new management team has introduced revised arrangements for operational management that are beginning to have an impact on the quality of provision.

- Staff have appropriate occupational qualifications and experience and benefit from a wide range of staff development opportunities in a variety of areas. However, few trainers are experienced teachers and many have only recently obtained or are working towards a first level teaching qualification. Since the last inspection, managers have focused more to improve English and mathematics provision, for example by offering regular staff development sessions. Many trainers still require further development in English and mathematics to be able to improve their teaching of English and mathematics.
- Since the last inspection, the use of data and management information has improved and managers now use detailed and accurate reports on apprentices' progress. Trainers discuss apprentices' progress with managers on a monthly basis in good detail and agree clear actions needed to improve their progress. Acacia's data indicate apprentices' progress towards completing their programme has much improved.
- Performance management has improved and is now good. The performance data are used particularly effectively to manage and improve trainers' performance and increase the number of apprentices who complete successfully. Recently, a number of trainers have left; the remaining and new trainers are working well to improve the progress of the apprentices whose progress has been slow.
- Action planning by managers and trainers is starting to improve the provision. For example, in team meetings, managers and trainers have identified the issues with the implementation of the electronics portfolio system and are making progress to eradicate the weaknesses in the use of the system.
- Managers are not yet using a well-designed new framework to monitor and improve the quality of provision well enough. The process for observing teaching, learning and assessment is established and planned well but observations and the subsequent validation of observations have failed to identify key areas for improvement. The checks on the quality of individual learning plans and progress reviews have not identified the issues adequately and hence not improved their quality. Trainers are not involved sufficiently with reviewing the quality of provision.
- Self-assessment arrangements are still weak and do not take information from some improved quality and management arrangements into account. The self-assessment report is inaccurate; it fails to identify key areas for improvement. Leaders and managers have overestimated the quality of all aspects of provision. Consequently, the whole process fails to make a real contribution to bringing about improvements. Trainers are not involved sufficiently with reviewing the quality of provision. Managers do not make sufficient use of apprentices' and employers' feedback to inform self-assessment or improvement strategies.
- Managers work effectively with employers and external partners including with Skills for Care & Development 'the sector skills council for people working in care setting' to plan the provision. Trainers provide valuable market information to allow managers to meet local need. The marketing team is effective in identifying regional and national training needs and in engaging employers in the training. However, Acacia does not meet the needs of apprentices and employers well enough; the training fails to challenge apprentices to achieve higher-level employability skills and vocational knowledge that they need to progress further in their profession.
- Leaders and managers promote equality and diversity actively with their involvement in supporting individuals, particularly in supporting apprentices who have been at a high risk of leaving their employment due to unacceptable behaviour from some of their workplace colleagues. However, managers have not ensured that trainers can promote equality and fair treatment and diversity and respect for differences well. For example, trainers do not discuss in sufficient depth with apprentices the impact of clients' differences on how care can be provided. The action plans to close performance gaps between groups of apprentices have not been effective.
- Safeguarding of apprentices is good. Records of staff checks and safeguarding incidents are detailed and indicate numerous successful interventions by managers and staff that clearly

protected apprentices. All appropriate policies and procedures are in place. Staff and apprentices have a good knowledge of safeguarding. Trainers recognise apprentices who are at risk of harm from a variety of sources and take good actions. Reporting procedures are tried and tested and highly effective. Training for staff and apprentices is good. The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Acacia Training 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	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	N/A	N/A

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

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	Select from list							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2000							
Managing Director	Ms. Victoria Francis							
Date of previous inspection	April 2013							
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+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	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+		
	18	563	7	394	0	10		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
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:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 							

Contextual information

Acacia was established in 2000 to provide training for employers and their employees in the care sector. Almost all its apprentices are on health and social care programmes; it plans to stop offering business administration and management apprentices. It operates from its head office in Trentham, Staffordshire. The company recruits apprentices from all regions in England. A managing director is responsible for all aspects of the company's strategy and operations. The managing director is supported by a team of four managers and 30 trainers. Acacia has contracts from other providers to offer training to around 600 learners, of who around 500 are apprentices.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Shahram Safavi HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the Curriculum, Delivery and Quality Manager 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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