

Access Training Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		22–26 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- the great majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications, with the majority doing so within planned timescales
- trainers support well the majority of employability learners to improve their confidence and skills to apply for jobs, with the result that increasing numbers find employment
- apprentices progress to higher level qualifications in large numbers and many gain promotion at work
- apprentices apply the knowledge they gain effectively in off-the-job training in the workplace, adding value to their employers' businesses
- trainers use their extensive industry knowledge and experience to make training sessions stimulating and vocationally relevant
- apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of how they can apply the values of equality and diversity in their workplaces and in their relationships with colleagues and customers
- managers make good use of their well-developed links with the Local Enterprise Partnership to plan a curriculum that supports the development of staff in small to medium enterprises
- managers support trainers well to improve the quality of their teaching and assessment, and act quickly to address any underperformance.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- poor management at a recently replaced subcontractor has resulted in a minority of health and social care apprentices not making fast enough progress to complete their qualifications on time
- the approach to the development of English and mathematical skills focuses too much on passing tests and not enough on deepening learners' understanding
- the quality of written feedback to learners is too variable, with the result that they do not always know what or how they need to improve
- actions in the quality improvement plan are not sufficiently detailed to ensure effective implementation.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that the health and social care apprentices placed with the new subcontractor complete their qualifications within planned timescales by intensifying the monitoring of their progress.
- Accelerate the implementation of the new English and mathematics strategy and revise its focus from teaching learners how to pass exams to developing their English and mathematical skills to gain a deeper understanding.
- Support trainers to write more detailed and specific feedback on marked work and assessments, so that learners know what it is they need to improve and how they might go about it.
- Make sure that actions in the quality improvement plan are precise and have clear timescales for completion, so that they can be monitored and implemented effectively.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The great majority of learners with Access Training Limited (Access) are apprentices, with the largest number being young people aged between 16-23-year-olds. There is an equal mix of level 2 and level 3 apprentice programmes with a small, but growing number, of higher level apprenticeships.
- Health and social care, including early years and playwork, and the range of subjects within business administration, are the two largest sector subject areas taken by apprentices. These subjects are graded as part of this inspection. Two subcontractors, one of them very recent, deliver about a quarter of the publicly funded provision, mainly apprenticeships in health and social care and business administration. Access also runs classroom-based learning, predominantly employability programmes, with the majority of learners mandated by Jobcentre Plus.
- The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications, with the majority achieving within planned timescales. Both overall and timely success rates are above national rates at all levels and age groups. Achievement is very good across most sector subject areas. In health and social care, however, a minority of apprentices are not making adequate progress towards the timely completion of their qualifications due to the poor delivery by one subcontractor. This subcontractor has been replaced, with early indications that the rate of progress for these apprentices is improving.
- Learners on short employability programmes make good progress from their low starting points, with the majority achieving their qualifications. Most learners have been out of work for more than twelve months, and face multiple barriers to re-entering the job market. Learners master the basic information and communication technology skills to research job opportunities and improve their written English to a level where they can produce presentable curricula vitae (CVs). The result is that a growing number find employment.
- Employers value highly the very good vocational and personal skills that apprentices acquire. Many employers who were themselves apprentices with Access send their own staff to be trained at the provider. For example, a senior regional manager for a large car dealership company now has many of her team leaders and administrators on apprenticeship programmes at Access.
- Theoretical knowledge developed on off-the-job training is applied effectively in the workplace. For example, managers on higher management apprenticeships use their understanding of

different management styles to improve the way they supervise their staff and set objectives for their teams. Business administration apprentices are coached successfully to develop their communication skills when talking to employers and customers on the phone.

- Pass rates for English and mathematics functional skills tests are good, as reflected in the high success rates for apprentices. However, the new English and mathematics strategy developed by managers lacks the necessary ambition to ensure that these skills are sustained beyond the successful completion of qualifications. For example, the requirement that any trainers teaching functional skills should have a minimum of a level 2 in English and mathematics is too low to equip trainers with the confidence and strategies to inspire learners to develop their skills more widely.
- Apprentices make very good progress whilst they are with Access, and once they finish their qualifications. Large numbers progress from level 2 to level 3, with those in accountancy and management progressing to the higher level qualification. The very great majority of apprentices are kept by their employers, and many take on extra responsibilities or gain promotion with their companies while they are still on their apprenticeships, or shortly after they leave.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, reflecting the high proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications and progress onto higher levels. Success rates on employability programmes are high and a growing number of learners find employment.
- Apprentices and classroom-based learners are highly motivated by the enthusiasm, vocational experience and knowledge of their trainers. Trainers provide very good care and support for learners, and are adept at encouraging them to become more independent in the way that they study and research topics outside the classroom and workplace. In employability sessions trainers build learners' confidence, with the result that they make good progress from their low starting points of few qualifications and long-term unemployment.
- In the majority of sessions, learning is well planned to meet the needs of learners. There is a good range of activities used to engage learners, such as video clips, demonstrations and quizzes. Trainers use questioning techniques skilfully to probe and reinforce deeper understanding. In a small minority of sessions, the learning is not always structured sufficiently, with the result that some learners find the tasks too challenging and become disengaged. Trainers do not always give learners enough time to respond to questioning and provide the answers themselves too quickly.
- Trainers are well qualified and have the relevant experience in their occupational areas. Many have qualifications in information, advice and guidance to supplement their teaching qualifications. They use their knowledge and experience effectively to motivate apprentices and make one-to-one training sessions stimulating and relevant to the apprentices' roles within their workplaces. For example, a higher level management apprentice was able to demonstrate enthusiastically how they had used the knowledge they had gained from the previous session to prepare training plans based on different learning styles for new employees joining their company.
- Initial assessment for apprentices is good. Trainers identify apprentices' needs quickly and accurately, and this leads to good planning and support throughout the rest of the programme. Reviews are regular, with effective tracking of apprentices' progress through the e-portfolio. Employers participate fully at reviews, where they contribute to the planning of future activities to enable apprentices to achieve their qualifications, with many of them organising additional training to that available on qualifications.
- Planning for assessment is thorough and timely, particularly in business administration and early years and playwork. Assessment evidence is collected through a wide range of methods including witness testimony, professional discussions, written assignments and the use of audio

to record assessment observations. Arrangements for internal verification and standardisation are robust, and there is regular monitoring of assessment processes.

- Feedback to apprentices and learners is inconsistent. Verbal feedback is constructive and informs learners of what they need to do to improve, and learners value the feedback they receive. Written feedback to employability learners includes corrections to their spelling and punctuation, with the result that their CVs are more presentable to employers. Written feedback to apprentices is variable and does not always provide them with a clear steer on what it is they need to do to improve. In health and social care, for example, written feedback is limited and is insufficiently focused on the weaker aspects of the work.
- The development of apprentices' English and mathematics is a high priority for trainers. A programme of accessible and flexible workshops enables apprentices to work on those areas of their English and mathematical skills which initial assessments have identified as in need of further development. The result is that many apprentices pass their functional skills qualifications early on in their programmes, and some achieve levels above those required by their frameworks. However, apprentices spend too long on practising past papers instead of developing a broader understanding of how to develop their English and mathematical skills further.
- Trainers provide apprentices with good pre-course advice and guidance which ensures that they are placed on the right level apprenticeship. Progression opportunities are discussed effectively with apprentices as they near the completion of their programmes, with the result that many progress onto a higher level. On employability programmes, trainers provide useful advice on personal issues and signpost learners to relevant external agencies for additional support, such as with housing or personal finance.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. At induction apprentices carry out activities supported by good quality resources to raise their awareness of these issues. Trainers reinforce this awareness during reviews and in taught sessions. As a result, the majority of apprentices demonstrate a good level of understanding of the importance of equality and diversity in their workplaces. For example, apprentices were able to explain the difference between direct and indirect discrimination in relation to protected characteristics, and give examples relevant to their businesses.

Health and social care

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care require improvement because:

- nearly half of apprentices did not complete their qualifications within planned timescales in the past year due to the poor performance of one major subcontractor
- too many apprentices have not made the progress they are capable of due to the lack of consistent guidance and support from trainers who were continually being changed in the early part of the programme; for example, one apprentice had three different trainers, and with each change he fell further behind with his qualification
- the feedback apprentices receive on their written work is limited to statements of praise for what they have done well but does not indicate what they might do to improve their work further; in a number of cases, apprentices are not prompted to amplify their written answers, or check their assignments carefully enough for mistakes before handing them in for assessment
- trainers do not plan effectively how to develop apprentices' English in their coaching sessions; lesson plans refer to completing written tasks without a clear indication as to which aspect of English they want to develop or how they propose to achieve it

- trainers do not stretch and challenge more able learners to demonstrate their ability due to a lack of varied and imaginative activities to engage them; there is an over-reliance on worksheets, where apprentices are writing in answers rather than being encouraged to question and discuss them more fully.

In health and social care the provider has the following strengths:

- apprentices make better progress under the new subcontractor; the recently appointed group of assessors has successfully re-engaged and motivated apprentices, many of whom are now on track to complete their qualifications overall and progress to a higher level
- apprentices now have well-planned sessions that make efficient use of their time and develop their knowledge and understanding of their roles well beyond the requirements of the qualification; for example, recording details of personal preferences for people diagnosed with dementia, such as preferring a bath or a shower
- effective initial assessment processes result in apprentices being quickly and accurately guided onto the right level of functional skills qualifications; and trainers have the information they need to tailor their coaching to meet the specific needs of individual apprentices.

Early years and playwork

Apprenticeships

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in early years and playwork are good because:

- the great majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications and develop good professional skills as early years practitioners; for example, in the development of their confidence to discuss children's progress with parents, and their knowledge about safeguarding children through the application of protocols about entering and leaving settings
- trainers effectively plan their coaching sessions, so that apprentices come prepared to each session and when they leave they are clear about what they need to do before the next session; this enables them to make productive use of their time and ensures good progress
- employers are fully involved in the delivery of the apprenticeship programme and support their apprentices with useful additional knowledge and understanding while they are at work; this enables apprentices to see the links between their everyday practice and the theory which underpins it, such as when they settle into the nursery children who do not speak any English
- trainers develop skilfully the mathematical skills of their apprentices through the use of relevant examples and their application to realistic contexts; for example, by getting apprentices to measure the area of a room to calculate the number of children and staff it can legally hold
- apprentices receive good initial advice and guidance to place them on the right level of programme with employers who can offer them the vocational experiences they need to develop their skills and achieve their qualifications
- trainers use reviews very effectively to stimulate discussions on equality and diversity, with the result that apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of how these issues relate to their vocational contexts; one review, for example, explored sensitively the different cultural practices in the toilet training of infants between groups.

Teaching, learning and assessment in early years and playwork are not yet outstanding because:

- apprentices do not get sufficient feedback on their written work to enable them to improve as quickly as they could; they are told what they do well, but not enough on what they could do to improve the structure or content of their assignments

- resources available to support learning are not of high enough quality or broad enough range; there is an over-reliance on textbooks, and little use of information and learning technologies to foster independent learning.

Employability training

19+ learning programmes

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in employability training are good because:

- a high proportion of learners on employability programmes achieve their qualifications; attendance and punctuality at learning sessions are good and learners make good progress in the development of their employability and information technology skills
- trainers provide very effective support to motivate learners to try new tasks; trainers use skilful questioning techniques that develop learners' confidence in their own skills, abilities and potential
- learners enjoy their learning and feel safe; learners that have initial concerns about the appropriateness of the programme are effectively settled into learning and the benefits of the programme are quickly understood and recognised in the good progress that they make
- personal support for learners is good; trainers work closely with learners to help them overcome any barriers by supporting them with benefit queries, access to hot meals and signposting to counselling services
- trainers provide comprehensive verbal and written feedback on learners' progress so that they identify how to improve the quality of job applications, CVs and covering letters
- learners develop good employability and information technology skills in lessons, in particular where trainers use a wide variety of resources, such as video clips in which employers explain the standards expected of job applicants
- planning and delivery of information technology and employability skills development is good; learners become much more effective at searching for jobs independently, adapting their CVs and letters of application to match the jobs that they are applying for and sending electronically
- trainers successfully support learners with the development of their spelling, punctuation and grammar to enable them to produce error-free job applications.

Teaching, learning and assessment in employability training are not yet outstanding because:

- trainers do not sufficiently plan for the development of learners' English beyond those needed to complete the programme; learners' mathematical skills are assessed but there are no activities in the programme to develop these skills
- trainers do not sufficiently prepare learners to maximise their learning from activities, such as those that develop teamwork and increase their understanding of a broader range of occupations.

Administration

Apprenticeships

Good

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration are good because:

- most apprentices achieve their qualifications on time and progress very well at work using the skills they acquire; apprentices are highly motivated to learn and take on new responsibilities

- trainers have very high expectations of apprentices and these are matched with highly effective support, teaching and resources to meet apprentices' needs; the combination of challenging work experience and training helps apprentices to progress swiftly
- trainers, employers and apprentices work particularly well together to provide valuable learning opportunities; one apprentice received excellent tailored training to help her improve communication skills at the request of the employer
- Access is very effective at matching young apprentices to high-quality employment opportunities where they settle into new roles quickly and make a good impression on their employers
- apprentices benefit from well-designed off-the-job training from which they acquire good technical skills and knowledge, such as how to negotiate; trainers complement this with additional coaching in the apprentices' workplaces
- trainers' assessment of apprentices' work is thorough and frequent; most apprentices submit work independently on-line and receive prompt feedback to assist their good progress
- trainers review apprentices' progress very carefully and give them detailed feedback while also being effective at agreeing clear targets with them and their employers
- apprentices' prior learning and experience, including that for English and mathematics, are identified accurately leading to detailed and measurable learning plans; trainers also take into account apprentices' early experiences of work to adjust their targets
- apprentices' English and mathematical needs are supported very effectively during workshops and one-to-one sessions; trainers continue to promote the value of these skills by, for example, carefully marking apprentices' work and asking them to spell out key words in training sessions.

Teaching, learning and assessment in administration are not yet outstanding because:

- trainers do not sufficiently plan workplace teaching sessions to better match apprentices' personal learning styles and abilities, for example through the use of technology, practical activities and more challenging work
- a small minority of apprentices are not encouraged enough to use the on-line facility to submit work independently
- the long-term aspirations of apprentices are not explored fully and supported by information and guidance.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The managing director, senior managers and trainers at Access have high expectations for their learners, and demonstrate a strong commitment to enabling them to achieve. Access has a long established mission to work with employers across the north east region to develop the skills of their employees. The strategic focus on continuous improvement is borne out by the consistently high and rising qualification and progression outcomes for learners and the number of local employers who repeatedly use Access as their preferred training organisation.
- Highly effective and robust systems are in place to review the quality and performance of subcontractors. Decisive action was taken when one major subcontractor responsible for delivering a large volume of health and social care apprenticeships was identified as performing poorly. A new subcontractor was quickly put in place, with the result that the disruption to apprentices was reduced. Improved monitoring and support for the subcontractor enables the current apprentices to make better progress.
- Arrangements to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are good. The observation system is well-planned and observers identify accurately the key features of lessons and reviews. Appropriate links between the outcomes of observations and staff development reviews result in useful actions to improve trainers' performance. Where improvements are not made, then actions to address these are taken decisively and quickly.

- Learning environments, resources and equipment in training centres are good. Managers have improved the range of on-line materials, and most apprentices use information technology-based learning resources and electronic portfolios, which give them an accessible visual display of their progress. Paper-based materials are of a high standard and graphics are used well to engage learners.
- The managing director and his senior managers make very effective use of their knowledge and contacts within the local business community to plan the curriculum. The managing director is chair of the training providers' network and represents this group on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). Managers use this information successfully to meet the needs of the large number of small to medium enterprise companies in the region, with a specific focus to develop the skills of managers, accountants and administrators from this sector through the intermediate to higher level apprenticeship programmes.
- The self-assessment process makes very effective use of feedback from apprentices, trainers and employers, as well as the outcomes from observations of trainers and assessors to build an accurate understanding of the overall strengths and areas for improvement of the provision. The analysis and judgements in the self-assessment report broadly agree with those made by inspectors.
- Targets for improvement in the quality improvement plan, however, are not detailed enough, or planned within measurable timescales, for managers to be clear about what actions they should take to achieve the desired outcomes or evaluate their impact. For example, the next steps following planned coaching observations are not spelt out, and the full implementation of the new English and mathematics strategy has been allowed to slip.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Creative use of visual presentations and video clips in taught sessions promote a deeper understanding of life in a multicultural society. Trainers at reviews are skilful at making equality and diversity themes relevant to apprentices' immediate workplaces and industries, using myth-busting true and false activities to emphasise the difference between treating people equally and treating them fairly.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Access maintains an accurate and up-to-date single central record of disclosure clearances. The designated lead officer is suitably trained and is proactive in providing staff and learners with the latest guidance and information on safeguarding issues. Staff have all recently undergone awareness training on the risks of radicalisation and extremism. The need to keep safe on-line is regularly reinforced at reviews.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Provider name

Access 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	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	2	2	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	3
Early years and playwork	2
Employability training	2
Administration	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	2065								
Principal/CEO	Mr Malcolm Armstrong								
Date of previous inspection	February 2012								
Website address	www.accesstraining.org								
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	29	N/A	66	N/A	3	N/A	2	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	100	178	32	215	N/A		54		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		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	29								
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"> Absolute Care Training and Education Limited FW Solutions Limited 								

Contextual information

Access Training Limited is a privately owned independent learning provider established in 1983. The head office and main training centre is in Gateshead, with another centre in nearby Chester-le-Street. It delivers the majority of its training in the north-east region, but through two subcontractors it also runs courses in Yorkshire.

As a substantial provider of apprenticeships, Access works in partnership with over 200 employers, the majority of them in the small and medium enterprise sector. Qualification levels in the north east are lower than those in the rest of the country, with a higher proportion of the workforce having qualifications at NVQ level 1 and below and a smaller proportion having NVQ level 4 and above. The unemployment rate in the region, although falling, is still above the national rate.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Charles Searle HMI
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One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the 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 on-line 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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