

Acacia Training Limited

Independent learning provider



19–22 January 2016

Inspection dates

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for apprentices	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Governors, leaders and managers have taken very effective action that has rapidly improved the quality of provision.
- Comprehensive and well-developed partnerships with employers, local groups and regional organisations ensure the provision is highly flexible and responsive in meeting the needs of apprentices and employers in the care sector.
- Managers use strong and effective methods to improve the work of their staff and hold them responsible for its quality; as a result apprentices make good progress and have good success rates.
- Enthusiastic, well-qualified and experienced tutor/assessors (TA) use a variety of teaching, learning and assessment methods to meet apprentices' individual needs.
- TAs prepare apprentices well to meet the diverse needs of care service users, and for life in British society.
- Apprentices develop good skills in health and social care and early years and playwork; they provide a good standard of care.
- TAs support apprentices very well to develop effective independent and reflective learning skills that provide a sound basis for their future learning.
- TAs make effective and flexible use of a range of assessment activities to meet apprentices' needs.
- Apprentices have a very good awareness of how to work safely in care settings, to keep service users and themselves from harm.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Quality standards across the apprenticeship programme are insufficiently consistent.
- Apprentices are not sufficiently skilled in setting their own learning targets, and employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learning at progress reviews.
- TAs provide insufficient written feedback on apprentices' work to tell them clearly how to improve the standard of their writing.
- A minority of apprentices are not confident in using technology and some have limited access to computers, which restricts their progress in learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Acacia Training Limited (Acacia) was established in 2000 to provide training for employers and their employees in health and social care, and early years and playwork. The company operates from its head office in Trentham, Staffordshire. Acacia recruits apprentices in both large and small- to medium-sized businesses from all regions in England.
- Around 1,020 apprentices currently study with Acacia and its subcontractor. Almost all of its apprentices are on health and social care programmes. About 525 are intermediate, 482 are advanced and 14 are higher apprentices; 1,012 of the total are aged 19+. Around 11 apprentices are on care-sector-based adult learning programmes. Acacia contracts with another provider to train 450 apprentices on their behalf. These apprentices are not included in this inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should scrutinise closely the implementation of quality improvement actions to ensure that improvements are consistent, well established and sustainable.
- During progress reviews, ensure all apprentices are set effective personal learning targets to support their development of knowledge and skills, and ensure that all employers take an active role in planning and reviewing on- and off-the-job learning.
- Ensure that all TAs develop skills in teaching, learning and assessment that extend apprentices' learning and standards of work.
- Improve the computing skills of apprentices who lack confidence, and provide access to computers to those apprentices who do not have them.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have undertaken an extensive and wide-ranging strategic review of the organisation. They have significantly revised the structure of the organisation and have strengthened procedures and practices. These actions have led to rapid improvements in the quality of the provision, which is good.
- Management of the quality of staff's work is particularly robust. Managers set TAs annual targets for improvement and systematically review progress towards them. They identify and tackle underperformance swiftly. Managers routinely challenge TAs during individual monthly meetings to ensure apprentices make good progress.
- Staff benefit from well-considered training and development that link well to key areas for improvement and the high expectations of leaders and managers. For example, all TAs have received training that has effectively extended their confidence in developing apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity, and how they prepare apprentices better for their working and personal lives in modern British society.
- Managers implement a good range of quality assurance and quality improvement initiatives which have led to improvements in the provision. They ensure that the self-assessment process includes the views of all managers, staff and learners, and uses a broad variety of evidence. Managers use the views of other stakeholders, such as employers, well to ensure accurate judgements of performance and standards. Staff have good opportunities to contribute to the self-assessment report. Although the grades in the self-assessment report match the findings of the inspection, it is overly descriptive rather than evaluative.
- The quality improvement plan does not reflect precisely enough the findings of the self-assessment report. It does not demonstrate whether improvements are consistent or sustained. Many of the initiatives that have contributed towards the much-improved standards and positive experience for apprentices are relatively new; their effectiveness and consistency over time in improving the provision are not yet fully evident over time. Improvements in some aspects of provision are not yet in place across all programmes; for example, the involvement of employers in planning and reviewing learning.
- Leaders' strategic approach and priority for the development of apprentices' skills in English and mathematics are good. By ensuring TAs teach English and mathematics using vocationally relevant vocabulary and scenarios, apprentices gain a good appreciation and understanding of how they use these essential skills in their everyday practice. A few trainers lack confidence in developing apprentices' functional skills, including their information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- The curriculum meets the needs of apprentices, employers and the community very well. Leaders and managers have a good understanding of the employment and labour market needs of the health and social care, and early years and playwork sectors. Staff use this information well to provide learners with valuable routes into apprenticeships, employment and further education. Managers work well through their strong partnership links with employers, to identify skills shortages and offer accredited and specialist training programmes, such as palliative and end-of-life care.
- Managers ensure that apprentices receive good initial advice and guidance, with in-depth information about options for achieving qualifications and developing skills that best suit their initial starting points, aptitudes and career aims.
- Staff promote inclusion, tolerance and understanding well, and maintain an inclusive and supportive environment for all apprentices. Staff have 'zero tolerance' of bullying, harassment, discrimination and unfair treatment. Apprentices have a good understanding of how the values of dignity, compassion and respect apply to service users and their personal lives. Managers have successfully reduced differences in achievement between different groups of apprentices.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The board of directors provides strong governance by setting high expectations, and establishing a clear vision for improvement across the organisation. Directors use data and other information well to hold leaders, managers and staff to good account.
 - Directors have been particularly effective in managing change. They have successfully overseen the implementation of a well-considered strategy for improving teaching, learning and assessment, which is having a significant impact on improving apprentices' progress and achievements.
 - The board of directors has managed well the successful restructuring of the senior leadership team and appointment of team leaders and new trainers. They have successfully instilled an organisational culture focused on ambition and the prioritisation of apprentices' progress and achievement.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- The leadership and management of safeguarding are effective. Managers and staff protect apprentices well from harm, and maintain useful links with external agencies. They record identified safeguarding issues well and manage disclosures sensitively and responsibly, making appropriate referrals to the relevant support agencies.
- Leaders ensure that they regularly review safeguarding arrangements. Apprentices feel safe and know whom they should contact if they have any concerns.
- Leaders ensure that all staff receive regular training, as well as updates and briefings on safeguarding issues, including the importance of promoting fundamental British values and protecting apprentices from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Staff place a high priority on protecting apprentices from these hazards.
- Apprentices are confident and understand how to protect themselves from harm including the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe on the internet.
- The company's arrangements for the safe recruitment of staff and maintenance of records are effective.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- TAs are enthusiastic, well qualified and experienced practitioners who share well their up-to-date knowledge of health and social care, and early years and playwork. They encourage apprentices to develop high aspirations and are adept at making them feel comfortable and confident about their ability to learn.
- Most TAs plan training well and deliver learning activities that challenge apprentices to make progress. They assist apprentices to develop their ability to work independently, be reflective and draw upon their experiences in the workplace in order to extend their learning. In a minority of sessions, TAs' questioning techniques are not detailed or challenging enough. As a result, a few apprentices do not make the progress of which they are capable.
- TAs make effective and flexible use of a range of learning environments and evidence recording opportunities to meet the needs of individual apprentices. They use a good range of resources to support learning, including online materials, carefully produced booklets, role play and audiovisual resources. For example, one TA introduced a role play so that an apprentice could practise working with a care service user who has dementia and is blind. The exercise posed some interesting challenges for the apprentice and resulted in a helpful reflective discussion which reinforced learning.
- TAs use e-learning effectively to support most apprentices to develop good ICT skills and encourage them to use the full extent of the electronic (e-) portfolio. A minority of apprentices are reluctant to make use of the online system for submitting and reviewing their work, and this sometimes restricts their progress.
- Assessment of apprentices' knowledge and practical skills development is thorough. TAs use a variety of methods that support apprentices' differing abilities to record and demonstrate their learning. For example, they use camera applications on tablets or smartphones to capture and record learners' evidence.
- Most TAs integrate English and mathematical skills into training well; they are good at showing how important these skills are in care settings. However, a very few TAs lack the skills to support the development of apprentices' numeracy skills.
- TAs provide detailed and helpful verbal feedback to apprentices. However, their written comments are often too brief and do not contain sufficient indications about how apprentices might improve their work; they do not always correct apprentices' written spelling and grammatical errors, and so do not promote good professional standards in this respect.
- Apprentices are not skilled enough in setting their own learning targets and action plans. Their targets and plans are insufficiently clear, and do not enable all apprentices to plan their learning activities well or evaluate their progress effectively.
- TAs work well with employers to plan assessment activities. Employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learning, to ensure that learners make the best use of both on- and off-the-job learning opportunities.
- TAs are responsive to apprentices with additional learning or social needs and they ensure that apprentices receive good support.
- TAs promote equality and diversity well and have raised effectively apprentices' awareness of the dangers associated with extremism, radicalisation and other forms of abuse, including through the internet. For example, in an induction session on aspects of British society the TA and apprentice had a well-informed and sensitive discussion on forced marriages and Sharia law.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

- Apprentices have a high level of health and safety awareness both for themselves and their care service users. For example, they ensure they apply the correct practice of washing their hands before and after putting on personal protective equipment and know about the side effects of administering medication. Apprentices looking after children and young adults work very effectively with external agencies to ensure they keep children and young adults safe.
- Apprentices enjoy their training and are well motivated. They work well with colleagues to provide effective personal care, ensuring the dignity of service users. Apprentices develop good work-related behaviour. Most apprentices who complete their training remain in employment and are keen to continue training at the next level.
- Apprentices acquire a good range of vocational skills. Employers value the high standard of their practical skills. Increasingly, apprentices are able to reflect on their own care practice and become more confident when caring for a service user. Many apprentices extend their knowledge and skills by completing additional training, such as specialist feeding techniques and palliative care.
- TAs understand apprentices' individual needs well and give sensitive support. Where apprentices are low in confidence or self-esteem, this support encourages them to stay on their programmes. TAs work well with employers to provide valuable support to apprentices with additional support needs, such as giving them extra time to complete their training at work, so they can successfully complete their qualifications.
- Apprentices carefully choose the optional apprenticeship qualification units that match their employment needs. The extra units they take extend their range of care skills well; for example, some apprentices learn how to support service users with dementia. The majority of apprentices develop their study skills well during training; for example, through independent research of a service user's religious beliefs, an apprentice learnt how to incorporate these beliefs into the user's care plan.
- The majority of apprentices are skilled in mathematics and have a good knowledge of number facts. This means they are able to apply their mathematical skills well in the workplace, for example when diluting cleaning products to prevent and control infection. The standard of apprentices' writing is good. Where relevant, staff encourage apprentices to complete their functional qualifications at higher levels than the requirements of the qualification.
- A minority of apprentices are not skilled or confident in using information communication technology, including the e-portfolio. Some have no access to a computer at home or at work. These apprentices do not make the progress in training that they should.
- Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work. They can apply this to their particular work setting and understand relevant requirements, like the importance of meeting care sector standards and of meeting the individual needs of diverse service users.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity. TAs check and reinforce this understanding effectively during learning sessions and at progress reviews. Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of the importance of recognising and respecting individual preferences and differences at work. They know how to protect themselves from the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Consequently, they are prepared to work effectively in modern Britain.

Outcomes for apprentices are good

- Over the last four years, apprentices' achievements have improved considerably. In 2014/15, Acacia's data indicate that success rates are good and are above the latest published national averages.
- The proportion of apprentices who complete their apprenticeship within the planned timescale is good, with most apprentices making good progress. The vast majority of current apprentices are on track to complete their programme within the planned time.
- Acacia has successfully reduced the differences in achievement between some groups of apprentices, and particularly between apprentices working in different regions. Male and female apprentices and intermediate and advanced apprentices perform equally well, as do apprentices who require additional support for their learning. The numbers of apprentices in different minority ethnic groups are very small, so that comparisons are unreliable.
- Learners' achievements in functional skills in English and mathematics are very good; the proportion of apprentices who successfully achieve functional skills levels above the requirements of their programme is high.
- The vast majority of apprentices remain in sustained employment on completion of their apprenticeship and, for a minority, this includes promotion. Improvements in their knowledge and skills support work expectations well. Many apprentices return to take higher-level qualifications with Acacia later in their career.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of apprentices	16-18/19+
Principal/CEO	Ms Victoria Sylvester
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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of apprentices (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	11	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	13	512	7	475			14	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	0		0		0			
Number of apprentices aged 14-16	0							

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"> North East Training Solutions

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Simon Cutting, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Victor Reid	Her Majesty's Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Nelson	Ofsted Inspector
Dr Philip Pullen	Ofsted Inspector
Allan Shaw	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the curriculum delivery and quality manager, as nominee, and carried out the inspection at short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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