

Omega Training Services Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

2–3 and 16–18 August 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- The good progress made in 2015/16 with improving achievement rates has now stalled, and too many learners leave without completing their qualification.
- Leaders and managers have failed to create and implement a strategy to ensure a consistently high-quality learning experience.
- Governance arrangements do not challenge leaders and managers sufficiently to improve outcomes for learners and the quality of the provision.
- The feedback provided by teaching and learning assessors to support the further development of learners' occupational skills is not effective enough.
- The learning programmes do not challenge all apprenticeships sufficiently to maximise the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.
- Leaders and managers do not analyse all data available to them to identify the cause of underperforming areas and to agree challenging improvement targets.
- Leaders and managers have not agreed a strategy to support the development of apprentices' English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills beyond level 2.
- Staff have not yet acquired a sufficiently deep knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values so that they can confidently support learners to increase their awareness of these topics.

The provider has the following strengths

- Experienced and committed assessors support learners well with the development of workplace skills.
- Leaders and managers have set up a flexible, well-planned curriculum that meets the needs of employers and apprenticeships well.
- Apprentices take pride in their employment and demonstrate a very professional approach when dealing with clients and colleagues.
- Targeted support for apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has resulted in a greatly improved and high achievement rate for this group.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Omega Training Services Limited (Omega) is an independent training provider with offices in Birmingham and Wakefield. Omega serves apprentices in the West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside regions. The company was established in Birmingham in 1996. The Wakefield office opened in 2010. Four directors, including a chief executive officer and a non-executive director, lead Omega. They are supported by six managers and a senior team leader who coordinates a further five team leaders. A total of 27 delivery staff work across both sites, including the teaching and learning assessors.
- Omega provides intermediate, advanced and higher-level apprenticeships in health and social care – where the vast majority of apprentices are – business administration, and education and training. Omega handles directly all aspects of the apprenticeships.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should improve their understanding and analysis of data to obtain a more accurate view of the underlying reasons for the underperformance of specific areas and aspects of the programme, including that of different groups of learners.
- Leaders and managers should agree and communicate to staff challenging targets for each of the apprenticeship programmes to ensure that they secure, and build on, further improvement of achievement rates.
- Leaders need to establish swiftly effective governance arrangements that constructively support and challenge leaders and managers to improve and hold them to account for the success of the apprenticeship programmes.
- Leaders and managers need to devise a well-informed and ambitious strategy that encompasses all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that apprentices have a high-quality learning experience, with particular attention to:
 - ensuring that all apprenticeships receive sufficient challenge and work to meet stretching targets during their learning programme to enable them to increase their occupational skills and knowledge
 - ensuring that the differing development needs of apprentices in relation to English, mathematics and ICT skills are captured and successfully met.
- Teaching and learning assessors need to develop the quality and precision of their feedback to ensure that apprentices receive clear guidance on how they can improve and make rapid progress.
- Staff need to develop a deeper knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values to support apprentices confidently to increase their understanding of these topics at work and in their daily lives.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers, although ambitious for apprentices' success, have failed to set a clear strategy for the organisation to provide an excellent learning experience for all apprentices. Consequently, managers have been slow to develop high-quality teaching, learning and assessment activities, leading to a decline in the quality of provision.
- Teaching and learning assessors receive valuable feedback from their formal and peer observations. This helps them to develop their practice. However, managers do not use this information well enough during appraisals and review meetings to set up specific and individualised objectives for staff for their development and training needs.
- Quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive and communicated well, enabling managers and staff to comply with the awarding organisation policy and to maintain standards. However, managers and staff do not ensure the appropriate sharing of identified examples of good practice to spread this consistently across the organisation.
- Managers collect a wide range of information from staff, employers and apprentices to monitor and evaluate current performance and to identify weaknesses in the provision. As a consequence, they have successfully improved the performance of apprentices with an identified learning difficulty and/or disability; their achievement is now well above that of their peers. However, they do not analyse data comprehensively enough to identify the underlying causes of poorer performance and to set challenging targets for improvement.
- The leadership team is well established and reacted quickly to stem the significant decline in apprentices' outcomes in 2014/15. Leaders promptly restructured the organisation, introducing a new post to tackle the number of apprentices leaving early. As a result, apprentices' outcomes recovered and slightly exceeded those of other similar providers. However, the improvement has stalled in the current year, with almost no perceptible improvement in 2016/17.
- The provider has developed strong links with employers and regional organisations, who recognise Omega's sound expertise in the delivery of curriculum, in particular in the health and social care subject. Leaders and managers are well informed of the current changes in the sectors in which they operate and are well placed to deliver the new apprenticeship standards that employers require. Teaching and learning assessors have wide experience in the subjects that they teach.
- Managers have designed a curriculum that reflects closely the needs of the employers with which they work. Apprentices are able to follow career pathways within the health and social care sector – including associated roles such as in customer service and business administration. Although leaders and managers prioritise the development of mathematics, English and digital skills, they have not developed the teaching and learning assessors' skills enough to advance apprentices' mathematics and English skills above functional skills level 2.

The governance of the provider

- The effectiveness of the oversight, support and challenge that leaders and managers receive from governors requires improvement.

- Governance arrangements have not provided the necessary support to enable leaders and managers to secure further improvement in the outcomes that learners obtain.
- The appointment of a governor last year has not ensured an appropriate external scrutiny and challenge of performance to hold leaders and managers to account for the delivery of good or better provision.
- Recently, leaders have taken steps to appoint governors from a high-performing local provider, but it is too early to measure the impact of this action.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Omega maintains a clear set of comprehensive policies that contribute well to the safeguarding of staff and apprentices in the health and care settings where they work.
- Appropriately trained and experienced designated officers monitor and promptly investigate and resolve safeguarding concerns, reporting them regularly to the senior team.
- Apprentices and employers receive useful, regular newsletters from Omega that raise the profile of relevant safeguarding topics such as child sexual exploitation and financial fraud for vulnerable older people.
- Leaders and managers have developed effective links with the local police to increase staff's and apprentices' awareness of the risks of radicalisation. However, managers accept that further development is needed to build the confidence of teaching and learning assessors and employers to ensure that all apprentices have a robust understanding of how to keep themselves safe from the threats of radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The apprenticeship programmes do not offer sufficient challenge to all apprentices. For example, the level and depth of knowledge that teaching and learning assessors provide on the leadership and management programmes are insufficient. Learning resources are not sufficiently challenging for these apprentices, who are often reliant on internet searches for their studies. Similarly, in health and social care, some apprentices are studying topics that they have previously learned, instead of developing their understanding of new content.
- Teaching and learning assessors set apprentices targets that are, in most instances, too vague and broad to ensure that all apprentices make rapid progress according to their potential. Targets predominantly focus on the completion of qualification units rather than the development of apprentices' wider practical skills.
- Following on from assessment, teaching and learning assessors provide apprentices with feedback that does not support them to improve their performance at work. As a result, apprentices continue to make the same mistakes and fail to build on their skills sufficiently. For example, teaching and learning assessors do not correct appropriately the multiple errors present in many apprentices' work.
- During learning and assessment sessions, teaching and learning assessors do not support the further development or improvement of English, mathematics and ICT skills for those apprentices who have already achieved a level 2 qualification in these subjects.

- Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe within their occupational role; however, apprentices in the West Midlands have a less developed understanding, compared to those based in Yorkshire, of the risks posed by extremism and radicalisation.
- Teaching and learning assessors do not develop effectively apprentices' knowledge of equality and diversity within sessions. Although apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of the individual diversity needs of their clients and service users, they do not develop a broader understanding of equality and diversity issues.
- Apprentices benefit from experienced teaching and learning assessors who have good subject and industry knowledge. This helps apprentices develop the skills and knowledge needed to achieve their qualifications. As a result, apprentices understand the importance of the topics studied within their qualifications, and how these relate to their job roles.
- The majority of teaching and learning assessors effectively integrate the development of English and mathematics skills into sessions. As a result, those apprentices undertaking functional skills qualifications at levels 1 and level 2 are developing confidence in these areas. For example, in health and social care apprentices understand the importance of mathematics in calculating the correct dosage for medicines and the importance of accurate written skills within care settings. However, in a small minority of lessons teaching and learning assessors' own spelling is inaccurate.
- In a majority of sessions, teaching and learning assessors use effectively information on apprentices' prior achievement to plan learning. In these cases, apprentices make good progress in their lessons and towards their qualifications. However, a small minority of sessions lack sufficient pace and are not challenging enough, leading to apprentices not achieving their full potential.
- A majority of apprentices demonstrate a good range of occupational skills. For example, apprentices develop skills in using ICT for their work and are becoming more self-assured when leading teams and working with directors, as well as working safely when using hoists to move service users in their care.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Apprentices do not always demonstrate appropriate self-management and motivation in their learning programmes. In a small minority of cases apprentices do not arrive adequately prepared for taught sessions. In these instances, apprentices do not complete the required preparatory work, or arrive without the equipment needed for the session, such as pens and paper.
- A considerable proportion of apprentices who have already achieved a level 2 qualification do not develop their English and mathematics skills sufficiently well. As a result, apprentices do not further improve their written English, including their spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Teaching and learning assessors do not regularly plan activities to revisit the relevance of the 'Prevent' duty and fundamental British values with apprentices in the context of their job roles or workplace. The apprentices based in the West Midlands do not demonstrate as full an understanding about these topics as those in Yorkshire, where they know about the dangers of extremism and how to keep themselves safe online and elsewhere.
- The large majority of apprentices receive initial advice and guidance which ensures that

they are on the appropriate programme. However, some teaching and learning assistants do not hold sufficient knowledge to support apprentices throughout their learning programme in identifying what they need to do to progress onto their next course of study or job role.

- The large majority of apprentices produce work of the correct standard for their qualification. However, in a few instances, apprentices' work at higher-level programmes does not demonstrate the skills expected at that level.
- A large majority of employers are well informed about apprentices' progress and are keen for them to achieve. However, in a few cases, employers are not sufficiently engaged in apprentices' progress reviews or do not take enough interest in their learning. Many of the apprentices work in busy care settings and at times their learning is interrupted as a result. Many, in particular the higher apprentices, do not have enough study time during their working hours.
- Apprentices take pride in their employment and demonstrate a very professional approach to dealing with clients, colleagues and managers. For example, in a care setting apprentices worked with sensitivity and calmness and treated clients with great levels of respect. Apprentices demonstrate particularly effective communication skills by showing consideration for colleagues and clients.
- Apprentices know how to keep themselves and others safe in the workplace. They are particularly knowledgeable about safeguarding their service users and how safeguarding concerns should be reported at work and during learning. Apprentices working with children or vulnerable adults demonstrate a particularly robust understanding of their specific safeguarding needs.
- The attendance and punctuality of apprentices for taught sessions are good, and managers have well-established and effective systems for monitoring and intervening where individual attendance of apprentices is of concern.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- The proportion of apprentices who leave the programme without achieving their framework, although improved, remains too low. Similarly, the number of apprentices who complete their framework within the planned end date is not high enough.
- The percentage of apprentices who achieved their full framework declined in 2014/15, when Omega increased the number of apprentices by a third.
- Achievement rates quickly rose the following year and slightly exceeded a low national rate. For a minority of apprentices in business administration, achievement rates rose significantly above the national average. Similarly, the few apprentices aged 16 to 18 achieved well and completed within the planned time.
- The improvement rate stalled in 2016/17 and achievement rates have remained similar to the previous year. For those aged 24 and over, who account for the majority of apprentices, the rate of achievement was too low. Only half of the higher apprentices, who represent a very small minority, achieved their framework within the planned date in the last two years.
- Apprentices make insufficient progress with their English and mathematics skills compared to their starting points. Approximately half of all apprentices have already

achieved the required level of English and mathematics when they start their apprenticeship at Omega. Those apprentices who already have a qualification at level 2 in these areas do not develop these skills further during their programme. However, the number of apprentices below level 2 in English and mathematics, who are doing functional skills at a higher level than the one they were assessed at, or the one required by the framework, increased considerably last year.

- The number of apprentices passing their English functional skills level 1 qualification first time declined in 2016/17 and requires improvement. In contrast, apprentices taking their English and mathematics functional skills tests at level 2 are doing better; those undertaking mathematics and ICT at the lower level are doing particularly well.
- Although steadily improving since the previous inspection, the rate of achievement by male apprentices has not increased sufficiently. On the other hand – and after a year of poor performance in 2015/16 – achievement rates for the small group of apprentices who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities improved greatly and are now good. The very large majority of apprentices who speak English as an additional language are making good progress with developing their English skills.
- Approximately a third of apprentices achieved a useful set of additional qualifications such as in first aid, manual handling, health and safety and paediatric studies in the last two years, which enhanced their apprenticeship framework and employment prospects.
- The number of apprentices who have progressed onto a higher level of apprenticeship has increased since the previous inspection, but this figure remains too low. In the last six months, a minority of apprentices have achieved a career promotion or increased their responsibilities at work.
- The majority of apprentices are currently making good progress in their learning, with a small minority not progressing so well. The standard of work for the majority of the apprentices meets the requirements of the qualifications they undertake.

Provider details

Unique reference number	53729
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of apprentices	16+
Approximate number of all apprentices over the previous full contract year	2,026
Principal/CEO	Maureen Smith
Telephone number	01214 333548
Website	www.omega-training-services.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of apprentices (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	22	521	10	546	-	150		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–		–		–			
Number of apprentices aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of apprentices for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations director as the nominee during the short inspection that took place between 2 and 3 August, and by the quality manager as the nominee during the converted inspection that followed on 16 to 18 August. 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.

Inspection team

Maria Navarro, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
Susan Gay	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Green	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Deane	Her Majesty's Inspector
Steve Lambert	Her Majesty's Inspector
Richard Ronksley	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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