

Alpha Care Agency Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

19–21 March 2018

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	Adult learning programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Leaders, managers and board members do not know enough about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Assessors do not help students to improve their understanding of health and social care enough in lessons.
- Students, many of whom speak English as a second language, do not improve their English sufficiently to enable them to be more effective in their jobs.
- Assessors do not teach lessons that interest students well enough, or that broaden their thinking about key health and social care issues sufficiently.
- Leaders and managers do not identify successfully, or improve quickly, weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Too few assessors provide students with clear and constructive feedback that shows them how to improve their practical skills and theoretical knowledge of care settings.
- Current governance arrangements do not provide the necessary support and challenge for leaders. They do not concentrate adequately on improving teaching, learning and assessment.

The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders, managers and staff make sure that students benefit from a safe and caring environment where everyone is valued.
- Students, many of whom have not been in education for a considerable time, gain in confidence and engage in learning well. They enjoy their learning and want to succeed in their jobs.
- Employers value the improved practical skills and theoretical knowledge in caring for others that students gain as a result of their research.
- Almost all students achieve their qualifications. As a result of their studies, students become more effective in the workplace.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Alpha Care Agency, trading as Alpha Gateway College (AGC), is an independent learning provider, based in Waltham Forest. AGC delivers qualifications for adult students in east, north and south London, all of whom are already in employment. Almost all these students study level 3 diploma courses in health and social care and are in receipt of advanced learner loans.
- AGC also acts as a subcontractor, delivering apprenticeships and working with employers and learners across London, Essex, Cheltenham, Coventry, Liverpool and Nottingham, although this was out of scope of the inspection. AGC has very recently started apprenticeship delivery as a prime contractor. Apprenticeship provision was not inspected and graded as part of this inspection.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders should:
 - introduce reliable and effective quality improvement and assurance arrangements that will provide managers with a clear and accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning
 - introduce training for assessors to quickly improve weaknesses in teaching, learning and assessment
 - support assessors to improve their teaching and feedback so that lessons test and improve students' subject knowledge
 - support assessors to provide students with constructive feedback on how to improve spelling, grammar, punctuation and mathematical skills
 - support assessors to set and monitor clear, achievable targets for all students
 - develop ways of tracking and testing students' understanding of British values and radicalisation and extremism.
- Leaders should consider establishing an independent board of governors to support the college and challenge it more effectively, and to scrutinise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders, managers and board members do not have a detailed enough knowledge of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment on level 3 health and social care programmes. They do not make sure that effective teaching helps students to increase their understanding of the care skills required in the workplace.
- Performance management processes do not lead to improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. During staff appraisals, managers do not refer adequately to strengths and weaknesses identified during lesson observations. The targets they set for staff in appraisals do not concentrate on improving teaching, learning and assessment. They do not take into account weaknesses identified in appraisal discussions. As a result, managers have little impact, through performance management, on tackling weaknesses or promoting good practice in teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff do not have clear actions for improvement resulting from observations of teaching and learning. Where managers set targets, these are not always measurable or time-constrained. Managers do not revisit targets during subsequent observations to make sure that staff have made progress. Consequently, not enough staff know how to improve their classroom practice.
- Leaders and managers have not developed a strategy to make sure that students learn quickly how to improve their English and mathematics skills. Assessors correct spelling, punctuation and grammar in assignments, but do not explain errors in English or mathematics, or teach students how to correct mistakes themselves. As a result, students do not learn how to avoid making the same mistakes again.
- Leaders and managers lead well by example to create a culture of respect and tolerance. Students enjoy their learning and form strong and positive relationships with staff. Staff support students effectively and build their confidence well to help improve their learning. However, students do not have enough opportunities to explore and discuss British values with assessors. Accordingly, their understanding of this subject is too limited.
- Leaders, managers and board members are passionate about the success of their students and the improvements that gaining a qualification can make to their lives. Staff support students effectively to complete their units. Students work hard in their own time to complete their level 3 qualification.
- Staff work closely with employers to offer qualifications that meet their needs. They have identified students around London who benefit from health and social care qualifications, and support them well to make sure that almost all achieve their qualifications. Assessors work closely with most employers to choose optional units that will benefit both the employer and the employee.
- Employers speak positively about the skills that students learn as a result of researching and studying. They identify areas such as improved knowledge of how to care for people and a greater understanding of how to perform their day-to-day jobs. Students become more confident in dealing with clients and external staff. They become more assertive and put their learning to effective use.
- Employers praise the effective communication they have with staff at AGC. Managers at

the college inform them quickly about the progress that students are making in achieving their qualification. They contact them quickly to raise any concerns. Employers talk positively about how staff tailor optional units well to students' current work needs.

The governance of the provider

- Current governance arrangements require improvement. Board members do not provide the necessary support and challenge for the effective quality assurance of the provision. Too many board members work in the company and so cannot provide independent, impartial challenge and scrutiny of the management of the provision. Board members do not meet frequently enough. They do not concentrate sufficiently on improving teaching, learning and assessment.

Safeguarding

- Managers have improved safeguarding measures over the past year. They conduct thorough recruitment checks for new staff. All staff undergo effective safeguarding training during induction. The college safeguarding officer has higher-level and frequent training.
- Students are safe at learning centres, and feel safe. They learn about safeguarding at induction and as a central part of their health and social care course. They discuss the 'Prevent' duty with their assessors. However, managers do not track the development of students' knowledge of the 'Prevent' duty in enough detail to be sure that they understand fully how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Students learn about e-safety at induction. They understand how to keep themselves safe when online. Although website filtering systems are in place in classrooms at AGC's base, leaders and managers have been slow to put in place systems to inform them if students are trying to access inappropriate material when on site.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Too few assessors develop students' subject knowledge in one-to-one or group lessons. Although students complete assignments for their qualification, they do not develop a broader understanding of health and social care, or relate it quickly to the client groups they work with.
- Staff do not use their knowledge and skills effectively enough to plan lessons to engage students fully. They do not challenge most-able students sufficiently to extend their thinking and reflect on improving their workplace practice. Assessors do not set sufficiently individualised personal targets for students. Almost all targets discussed at reviews relate to unit completion rather than the development of wider skills and behaviours. Students do not learn enough about the wider aspects of health and social care in taught lessons.
- Too few assessors check learning effectively enough in lessons to make sure that students fully understand concepts that they are discussing. They do not link learning and understanding effectively enough to the workplace. As a result, students do not have

sufficient opportunities to extend their learning in lessons.

- Assessors, in their feedback on students' work, do not give enough information about what they have done well and how they can improve their work and subject knowledge. They concentrate too much on how students can meet unit criteria, rather than on how they can improve their understanding of the subject. Assessors do not use errors in students' work to direct further learning and to improve gaps in the students' skills.
- Although assessors have attended training on British values and the 'Prevent' duty, they do not yet have the confidence to explore these topics in enough depth with students. Consequently, students' learning about how these topics affect their daily lives is often superficial.
- Staff do not use assessment processes successfully enough to identify students with a learning disability or difficulty at the start of their courses. As a result, these students do not always receive the support they need to help them complete their qualification rapidly.
- Well-motivated students, many of whom work shift patterns, appreciate the flexible help that assessors give them. Assessors support students fully between lessons if they are not able to attend. They explain to them in detail how to complete their assignments. This helps students to understand well the requirements of the qualification. Most students submit high-quality final drafts of work.
- Assessors' detailed and effective oral feedback from workplace observations allows students to reflect fully on their practical work. Assessors help students to identify areas where they could improve or change their practice. This helps them to be more effective in caring for their clients.
- Students develop a good understanding of the importance of equality, and how to work effectively in a diverse society. They discuss these topics effectively with assessors, and learn how to relate them to their workplace. For example, a student could confidently explain how she communicates with a client who has limited hearing.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Staff and students from widely varying backgrounds and cultures work admirably together. Staff understand well students' backgrounds and reasons for studying. They work hard to create a highly respectful and welcoming environment where students feel safe and everyone is valued.
- Students, very few of whom have benefited from recent educational opportunities, are grateful for the courses that AGC provides. Students attend frequently and present their work well. They are punctual and courteous. They produce work of a good standard.
- During their studies, students quickly become more confident and self-assured. They develop an enthusiasm for learning and can apply their new knowledge to their job role in the care sector. They often gain extra responsibilities and promotions as a result of achieving their qualification. Students, and their families, are proud of what they have achieved.
- Staff celebrate students' successes very effectively through public events within the community. They invite high-profile guests to present awards to recognise the success of

their students. Students and their families value their qualifications.

- Assessors provide good careers advice for students throughout their programmes. They have high aspirations for their students. They challenge students effectively to set ambitious goals for themselves. An effective partnership with a local community organisation supports effectively students who wish to progress to higher education.
- Students do not learn enough about topics to do with personal welfare, including British values and how to keep themselves safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Assessors do not include effective discussion and learning about these ideas in their lessons. Most assessors do not test students' understanding effectively enough. Consequently, managers cannot be sure that students are improving their learning in these subjects.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- The proportion of students who successfully achieve their qualifications rose substantially in 2016/17 and is very high. Almost all students who start their health and social care course now stay at AGC to finish their programme. All students who complete their course pass their level 3 health and social care qualification.
- Students enjoy their learning. Many have been away from education for long periods of time and they speak positively about how their assignments and studies have helped them improve their skills and gain confidence. For example, a student spoke about how her improved knowledge of policies and procedures in health and social care had helped her become more insightful when caring for her clients.
- Students produce detailed and well-researched work. The standard of their written assignments is high. Highly motivated students spend a great deal of their own time preparing work and investigating topics in depth. This enables them to meet the requirements of the qualification. As a result of their studies, they learn how to be more effective in their work roles.
- Leaders analyse the differences in the performances of different groups of students well. They identified a need to improve achievement rates for male students in 2016/17 and responded quickly by employing more male assessors. However, it is too early to judge the impact of these actions.
- Leaders know where their students progress to after completing their courses. However, they do not record and analyse what courses they move on to or those that receive promotion or positions of greater responsibility as a result of their learning. Consequently, they are not able to analyse fully the impact of their courses.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58538
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	89
Principal/CEO	Audrey Soyam
Telephone number	020 8527 1627
Website	www.agcollege.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	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	–	–	–	–	–	61	–	–
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	2	–	–	11	–	–		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	–	–	–	–	–	–		
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	–							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	–							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	–							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners 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

Andy Fitt, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tricia Collis

Ofsted Inspector

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