

Acacia Training and Development Ltd

Independent Learning Provider

Inspection dates

12–13 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings

This provider requires improvement

- The proportion of apprentices who successfully complete their apprenticeship has fallen since the previous inspection. Too few who complete their apprenticeship do so within the time planned.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are not of a sufficiently high standard to enable apprentices to make good progress. Senior leaders have not taken the actions necessary to redress a decline in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Senior leaders have not made sufficient progress in dealing with recommendations made at the previous inspection. Systems for monitoring apprentices' progress are not routinely effective. Assessors do not develop apprentices' English and mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding sufficiently.
- Senior leaders' extensive reorganisation of the company during 2016/17 has not led to improvements in apprenticeship provision and apprentices' achievement.
- Trainers do not provide the teaching, learning and assessment necessary for apprentices to progress rapidly through their apprenticeship. In a small number of cases, employers do not give apprentices the time they need to complete their work.
- Tutors and assessors do not provide the teaching, learning and assessment necessary for apprentices to progress rapidly through their apprenticeship.
- Leaders and managers do not consider sufficiently what happens to their learners on completion of their programme. They do not take enough account of employers' needs when designing their apprenticeship programme.

The provider has the following strengths

- A very high proportion of adult learners successfully complete their courses.
- Apprentices benefit from additional short courses that improve the range of skills they need to do their jobs. Adult learners improve their chances of gaining employment through the short courses they study.
- Many learners feel well supported. This helps them develop self-confidence, become better prepared to seek employment and overcome any personal issues they may face.
- Learners and apprentices do their jobs better when tutors and assessors use their extensive knowledge and experience of their industries well when training them.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Acacia Training and Development Limited (ATD) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Somerset Care Ltd. It has learners across the south-west. Most learners are apprentices aged 24 and over, working in health and social care or early years settings. A minority of apprentices are employed in business administration, management and accountancy. ATD subcontracts a small minority of its provision for apprenticeships in health and social care, early years, heating and ventilation and hairdressing.
- ATD provides courses for adults in Plymouth. These are mostly short or very short courses. Subjects include health and social care and functional skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). It also offers short courses for people who are unemployed. ATD provides a very small number of traineeships in its centres in Taunton, Plymouth and Exeter.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that tutors and assessors:
 - develop stimulating and challenging tasks for learners and apprentices which enable them to develop new skills and knowledge and produce higher standards of work
 - increase the extent to which apprentices develop English and mathematics skills that are relevant to their jobs and the industry in which they are employed
 - improve the accuracy of targets they set for learners and apprentices on how they can improve further their knowledge, skills and standards of work
 - monitor apprentices' progress more closely and use the information to intervene when needed so that more apprentices complete their apprenticeship within agreed timescales.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - identifying weaknesses in order to set targets to tackle these and monitor the effectiveness of the actions taken on meeting these targets
 - using the information and data they have about the progress apprentices make to target their actions on those who are at risk of not completing their apprenticeship quickly enough
 - monitoring more closely the impact of training on learners' progression into employment and apprentices' progress in improving their careers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have not been sufficiently effective at dealing with the weaknesses identified by inspectors. Apprentices' achievement rates have declined. Leaders have not paid sufficient attention to improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. While health and social care apprentices improve their computer skills well, learners' access to online resources to support their learning remains underdeveloped.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that reliable information is collected about learners' and apprentices' progression into further training, employment and better jobs. As a result, they are unable to fully evaluate the impact of the courses or apprenticeships on getting good jobs or careers. Data about the recruitment and performance of vulnerable young people, such as care leavers and those who have been in receipt of free school meals, is not monitored to ensure that they are supported well and make good progress.
- Leaders have not acted quickly enough to arrest the decline in the proportion of apprentices achieving their apprenticeship, both overall and within the allocated time. Since January 2018, they have set clear targets and taken appropriate actions to deal with this. However, it is too soon to evaluate whether these actions are bringing about the necessary improvements.
- Over the last two years, senior leaders have restructured the management of the company. As a result, managers now have appropriate roles and clear responsibilities. Leaders hold managers and staff closely to account for their work and for the progress their learners make. However, during the period of the restructuring, leaders and managers did not take effective actions to stop the decline in the outcomes for apprentices.
- Managers also failed to arrest a decline in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Since they recognised this decline, they have taken prompt action. Some assessors have left the company, and there are plans in place to train others.
- Leaders closely monitor the quality of their subcontractors. They meet with each to discuss their performance every three months and carry out a full review annually. They take decisive and effective action if the quality of provision declines. For example, leaders decided in 2016/17 not to continue to work with one subcontractor because of falling achievement rates and changes in management. Leaders then acted quickly to make sure that all apprentices could continue their apprenticeship with ATD.
- Leaders and managers have successfully improved the advice and guidance they provide to apprentices about their current job. For example, health and social care apprentices understand the importance of gaining a qualification that meets regulatory requirements. However, tutors and assessors do not provide apprentices with sufficient information on options they might follow after completing their apprenticeships.
- The majority of trainees and adults on employability courses gain useful skills to prepare them for the rigours of employment through additional qualifications such as first aid and manual handling.

- Managers have appropriately aligned the provision to meet the skills needs of their parent company and employers in the communities they serve. They successfully offer a small number of courses aimed at improving the chances of adults returning to employment. However, they do not evaluate the success of these courses in achieving this aim.

The governance of the provider

- A board that includes senior leaders from ATD's parent company and other non-executive members has identified a risk of a further decline in the overall achievement for apprentices in 2017/18. However, it has not scrutinised the reasons behind this sufficiently. In addition, any subsequent action has not been swift enough to ensure that the proportion of apprentices achieving does not decline further.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers have put appropriate measures in place to recruit staff with appropriate experience. They carry out appropriate checks when recruiting staff.
- Learners and apprentices, including those in subcontracted provision, understand how to keep themselves safe in the workplace. They understand the importance of completing risk assessments. Apprentices in heating and ventilation, for example, explain how employers complete and share risk assessments before apprentices attend a new worksite.
- Through their induction, staff are trained in their responsibilities for safeguarding and their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty and health and safety. The designated safeguarding lead provides regular updates on current issues relating to safeguarding and uses her links with ATD's parent company well to keep staff informed about safeguarding issues in the care sector. For example, the designated lead for safeguarding has provided tutors and assessors with guidance for their care apprentices on the safe use of wheelchairs.
- The designated lead for safeguarding keeps appropriate records of safeguarding concerns about learners and apprentices and follows these up well with staff and outside agencies when appropriate.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not consistently good enough. Tutors' and assessors' expectations of what apprentices and learners are capable of achieving are not high enough. Where they give feedback, it does not help apprentices to complete the work they are set quickly enough or to a high enough standard. Consequently, too many apprentices and learners do not develop their skills and knowledge to their full potential. Apprentices' progress is slow, with a lower proportion completing their programme by the planned end date than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Tutors and assessors do not set sufficiently demanding targets for apprentices to help them achieve their qualifications quickly enough. They frequently do not match targets

well enough to the specific job or career aims of each apprentice. Assessors do not routinely monitor whether apprentices have achieved their targets or record when they have been met. Tutors and assessors do not set activities and tasks that are sufficiently effective in developing apprentices' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The work they set apprentices and learners is too narrowly focused on completing qualifications.

- Tutors and assessors do not ensure that apprentices improve their English and mathematics sufficiently. Very few apprentices achieve a functional skills qualification beyond the minimum required for their apprenticeship. Very few are aware of the opportunities to study these subjects at a higher level. Too many apprentices present work containing grammatical and spelling errors which tutors and assessors do not routinely or swiftly correct.
- A significant minority of apprentices do not develop new skills and knowledge. Their training concentrates on accrediting skills and knowledge they already have. For example, apprentices with vast experience of working in different care settings describe how the apprenticeship has been easy and has not significantly raised the standards of their work.
- Assessors do not set deadlines for apprentices to complete work. This contributes to a high proportion of apprentices progressing slowly through their apprenticeship. Apprentices and adult learners value the helpful constructive verbal feedback from assessors and tutors on their progress. This is generally immediate and clearly identifies areas for future development. However, assessors and tutors do not expect learners and apprentices to record this and some soon forget the advice they have been given.
- Assessors are suitably qualified. They plan sessions well using their professional experience of the knowledge and practical skills that are of value to apprentices. All assessors stay up to date with developments in their industry, for example care assessors who work with clients with multiple sclerosis pass their specialist knowledge on to their apprentices.
- Most employers have a good understanding of the skills and knowledge apprentices need to demonstrate in order to complete their apprenticeship. They ensure that training in the workplace is relevant and timely. For example, employers in the care industry train apprentices in how to distribute medication. As a result, apprentices gain the knowledge they need to pass relevant elements of their apprenticeship and employers gain a more efficient workforce.
- Tutors successfully encourage adult learners to develop their skills in English. For example, learners nearing the end of their employability training programme focus on correct spelling and formal use of English when writing a letter of application for a job. English and mathematics tutors provide apprentices with useful feedback on how to make progress towards achieving their functional skills qualifications.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Apprentices develop their self-confidence well. Most health and social care apprentices gain new knowledge that deepens their understanding of how to perform their job roles. However, too many apprentices in health and social care do not learn new skills on their apprenticeship but simply practise and demonstrate the skills they already have.
- Adult learners on employability programmes complete a good range of qualifications and

additional activities, such as training on writing a curriculum vitae (CV) and interview practice. They acquire computing skills to help with completion of online forms and job applications. These enhance their employment prospects and support them well to become more confident to apply for jobs.

- Traineeship programmes include a strong focus on the personal and social skills trainees need if they are to secure employment. Trainees respond well to this training. They attend regularly and learn the attitudes and behaviours employers expect of them.
- Apprentices feel safe and have good awareness of safe working practices. Apprentices undertake regular safety checks of their working areas. They understand their obligations to protect themselves and their colleagues and clients by paying due regard to the health and safety regulations.
- Apprentices show respect for each other and an awareness of diversity in society. They know how to apply this knowledge when working with people from different cultures and backgrounds. For example, health and social care apprentices respond appropriately to the diverse dietary needs of clients with different religions and beliefs.
- Apprentices and learners are safe, feel safe and have a good awareness of maintaining good health and safety practices. However, apprentices and learners do not know enough about how to protect themselves from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, and are unaware of who they should report concerns to.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- A lower proportion of apprentices complete their apprenticeships than at the time of the previous inspection. While around two thirds of health and social care apprentices complete their apprenticeship, it was around three quarters at the time of the previous inspection. Only just over half of business apprentices complete their apprenticeship. Overall, only just over half of the apprentices achieve their apprenticeship in the time allocated to them.
- The proportion of apprentices who completed within the allocated timescale remains high in hairdressing but is low in health and social care.
- A very high proportion of adult learners achieve their short and very short qualifications. Most learners who take a functional skills qualification achieve their qualification, although the proportion has fallen slightly over the last two years.
- In 2017, the proportion of apprentices achieving their apprenticeship increased for hairdressing and health and social care compared to the previous year. Achievement of apprentices in subcontracted provision is high.
- While managers monitor the progress of current apprentices, they are not confident that the proportion of apprentices achieving within the allocated time will improve. Data does not show a consistent improvement compared to the same point the previous year.
- Most apprentices are making the progress expected of them towards completing their apprenticeship. Those on standard apprenticeships are developing the skills and knowledge they need to do their jobs well. However, a small but significant minority of framework apprentices are well beyond their planned completion date and are not making the progress towards completion of which they are capable.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Adult learners on employability, distance learning and traineeship programmes acquire the knowledge they need to move on to a work placement and eventual employment. Skilled tutors use their expertise and comprehensive subject knowledge well to plan and deliver good courses. They use ICT and activities to improve teamwork skills and to make lessons enjoyable, interesting and relevant to learners' work placements and employment.
- Tutors have high expectations of their learners. Tutors' enthusiasm and individual coaching ensure that learners develop in confidence and make good progress in developing skills and knowledge. Tutors ensure that learners produce work of a high quality and provide them with useful feedback if the standard of work needs to improve.
- The majority of tutors focus effectively during employability and traineeship sessions on improving learners' use of mathematics and English. Tutors help them develop skills which they found difficult in the past. Feedback on learners' work clearly identifies incorrect spelling and grammatical errors. However, a small minority of learners do not routinely correct their mistakes in line with their tutors' feedback and often repeat their mistakes.
- Most learners make good use of ICT to improve their skills and understanding. Learners use web-based resources well to research local job opportunities. They tailor their CVs and personal information well to suit their applications for different work placements or employers.
- Learners benefit from good individual coaching and feedback that enable them to make generally good progress. They gain new knowledge and skills that prepare them well for the next stage in their learning or career. Tutors provide effective support for learners who fall behind. For example, learners receive effective individual tuition and homework which enable them to catch up on missed work.
- Tutors develop learners' personal and vocational skills well. Learners become more mature and self-reliant and work with increased independence. The majority of adult learners grow in self-confidence and motivation.
- Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity and the importance of demonstrating inclusive behaviour and language in the workplace.

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have not taken enough action to ensure that all assessors and tutors follow the providers' procedures to ensure that apprentices complete within their planned timescales. Managers have increased their support for tutors and assessors and have recently started setting higher expectations for apprentices' progress. On a few courses, outcomes have risen in recent years. Despite this, the overall proportion of apprentices successfully completing their apprenticeship has decreased in recent years.
- Not enough assessors liaise closely with employers to ensure that the programme allows

apprentices to make rapid progress. They do not always inform employers of the purpose of the visits they make to apprentices in the workplace, and too many are cancelled or postponed. This creates frustration for the apprentices and slows their progress.

- Some employers are not sure how to raise concerns with the provider. As a result, managers do not resolve these quickly enough and managers were slow to deal with staffing issues on accountancy apprenticeships. Employers provide training in the workplace for their apprentices which helps them develop industry-standard skills.
- A minority of assessors do not check sufficiently that apprentices understand the topics they have studied. Most assessors successfully encourage apprentices to pursue a deep understanding of a topic but a small number accept only superficial responses. During discussions, a small number of assessors do not allow the apprentices sufficient time to respond before giving them the answer.
- Assessors and tutors do not correct spelling and grammar errors in apprentices' assignments sufficiently. They do not offer apprentices guidance on how to improve their written English. Assessors are not confident in their own written English skills and a small amount of their written feedback to apprentices contains spelling and grammatical errors.
- Not enough assessors and tutors provide apprentices with clear advice and guidance on the requirements of the apprenticeship. Assessors and tutors provide apprentices with careers advice that is relevant to the jobs they are currently doing but not enough about how their career could develop.
- Apprentices feel safe and are confident about how to report any concerns they have. They are aware of the safeguarding issues they may encounter and have a good understanding of how to report concerns. Apprentices who work alone or work on night-time shifts understand how to reduce risks to themselves.
- Apprentices who complete their apprenticeships develop high levels of self-confidence, feel more valued in the workplace and increase their job prospects. Apprentices in the care industry increase their understanding of the rationale for key policies and practices and they apply these well when dealing with clients, relatives and managers. Adult apprentices report a sense of achievement from gaining their qualification.

Provider details

Unique reference number	50303
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	3,496
Principal/CEO	Hazel Lessiter
Telephone number	01752 670 811
Website	www.acacia.ac.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)	0	107	0	204	0	23	0	12
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	42	276	24	281	0	80		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	11		2		13			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	N/A							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	None							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Gary Henri Flying Starts Nursery (SW) Ltd ChanniCool Training Services limited Taylors of Grampound							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the quality manager, as nominee. 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 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

Steven Tucker, lead inspector stage 1	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Bennett, lead inspector stage 2	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Hunter	Ofsted Inspector
Tricia Pugsley	Ofsted Inspector
Heather Marks	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector
Alun Maddocks	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Fitt	Her Majesty's Inspector

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