

ACE Training and Consultancy Limited

Not-for-profit organisation

Inspection dates

15–18 January 2019

Overall effectiveness			Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good	16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good	Apprenticeships	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good		
Outcomes for learners	Good		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection			Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum that meets the needs of learners and employers in the construction industry. They design their pre-apprenticeship programme and construction apprenticeships very carefully to help learners develop the skills they need to be successful employees.
- Leaders use their strong links with the construction industry to benefit their learners. Learners improve their knowledge of employment opportunities and their job prospects.
- Learners develop good practical industrial skills. Those on brickwork courses produce practical work of a particularly high standard.
- Leaders, managers and staff are ambitious for their learners. They set high standards that almost all learners achieve.
- Staff make sure that learners understand the importance of health and safety in the construction industry. This helps keep them safe and improves their well-being at work.
- Learners benefit from the additional qualifications they gain during their courses. These help them to become work-ready and employable.
- Almost all study programme learners move on to apprenticeships, further education or employment after their training.
- Staff use their industry knowledge and expertise to enthuse learners. They motivate them to work purposefully, enthusiastically and professionally.
- The beneficial training that apprentices receive allows them to develop highly relevant work-related skills. These help them to contribute to their workplaces.
- Staff provide excellent support for learners. This helps them to make good progress and catch up quickly if they fall behind.
- Teachers do not provide learners with detailed enough feedback to help them improve their written work.
- The proportion of study programme learners who achieve their qualifications has increased substantially over the past three years, but is still too low.
- Staff do not correct mistakes in written English in learners' assignments. As a result, learners do not develop their English skills sufficiently.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Ace Training and Consultancy Limited (ACE Training) was set up in 2011 and is located on an industrial estate in Kidlington, near Oxford. Staff at ACE Training work closely with construction companies across Oxfordshire and surrounding counties, providing 16–19 study programmes for school leavers and those not in education, employment or training. The study programmes are designed as pre-apprenticeship courses to help learners who have little or no experience of construction to develop skills to progress to apprenticeships, employment or further education.
- In 2017, ACE Training began offering its own apprenticeship courses at levels 2 and 3 in construction, predominantly in brickwork and carpentry and joinery. ACE Training works with two subcontractors. The Engineering Trust delivers apprenticeships in all aspects of engineering, with learners from ACE Training following apprenticeships including aerospace and maintenance and operations engineering. Synolos delivers bespoke study programmes for a small number of learners in bricklaying and wood trades. Three directors have overall responsibility for ACE Training.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should develop strategies to enable all study programme learners to gain accreditation during their course.
- Staff and assessors should set clearer targets for study programmes learners and apprentices that identify the skills and knowledge they need to develop.
- Leaders, managers and staff should make sure that all learners improve their English skills during their courses. Staff should also provide appropriate support for those on GCSE courses to help them achieve their qualifications.
- Leaders and managers should make sure that learners can improve their written work by:
 - checking that teaching staff clearly identify areas for improvement in assignments
 - improving the quality of feedback from teachers on written work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders have high expectations of what learners can achieve. They motivate their staff to enthuse and interest learners. They have developed a strong vision and ethos for the company, based around excellence in practical construction work.
- Leaders and managers plan the curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of learners and employers. The training that they provide in construction fills a gap in the local education offer. They have developed a sensible and flexible pre-apprenticeship study programme specifically to allow learners to move on to apprenticeships, employment or further education as soon as they are ready. Well-planned apprenticeship courses enable apprentices to move into full-time employment or further and higher education. Leaders are developing a level 7 site managers' card course to meet the needs of local employers and develop job promotion opportunities for learners.
- Leaders understand the construction industry very well. They use their excellent links with large and small construction businesses to support their learners. They make sure that the training courses they offer meet local and regional needs for housebuilders and civil engineers. Employment opportunities for their learners are long term and sustainable.
- Employers value the links they have with staff at ACE Training. Employers give frequent feedback to staff about the quality of the provision during visits by assessors and meetings with managers. This helps leaders to develop and improve their courses. Staff and employers work closely together to identify and improve the specific skills that employers need from their employees.
- Leaders' close links with local enterprise partnerships in the area give them a strong understanding of employment opportunities for their learners. They develop effective connections with schools and employers to help recruit learners interested in construction. They work closely with prestigious major construction employers in the area. This provides high-quality work experience placements and employment for their learners.
- Leaders, managers and staff work effectively to make sure that learners and apprentices enjoy a positive learning environment. They lead by example. They provide a welcoming and aspirational environment for learners, many of whom have struggled in the past with formal education. Learners view their achievements with pride. Staff celebrate the success of their learners admirably.
- Managers observe teachers frequently and identify strengths and weaknesses clearly. However, they do not set clear enough targets to improve teaching and learning. They do not check progress against teaching or appraisal targets closely enough to make sure that the very small amount of weak teaching improves rapidly.
- Leaders and managers work closely with subcontractors to check and improve quality of provision. They have developed effective links with managers in the Engineering Trust and Synolos and visit frequently. They make sure that apprentices with the Engineering Trust make fast progress. Study programmes learners with Synolos benefit from a very strong enterprise programme that develops their knowledge of paid work well. Managers at ACE Training do not directly observe teachers in subcontractors' provision frequently enough. They rely too heavily on subcontractors' lesson observations to inform them of

the quality of teaching, learning and assessment at the Engineering Trust and Synolos.

- Leaders and managers do not plan sufficiently to support the small number of learners who need to retake their GCSE English and mathematics qualifications.

The governance of the provider

- The managing director, training director and operations director oversee the company effectively. They challenge staff and each other to improve. Their improvement monitoring processes hold all staff, including themselves, to account. They know the strengths and weaknesses of their company. They have made substantial improvements to achievement and retention rates for study programme learners since the previous inspection. They have made sure that their new apprenticeship provision is of high quality.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Learners feel safe and are safe. They know how to report any concerns they have about themselves or their colleagues.
- Learners learn in detail how to keep themselves safe at work. Staff at ACE Training and the Engineering Trust reinforce the importance of health and safety very effectively. They insist on safe working practices and protective clothing. As a result, learners are well prepared for the requirements of professional work. Managers do not check that staff and learners at the subcontractor Synolos always wear the correct personal protective clothing in carpentry workshops.
- Safeguarding staff update their training frequently and keep detailed and secure records of concerns. They use their close links with external agencies effectively when needed. Employers and subcontractors know how to report any safeguarding concerns. Leaders make sure that learners are safe while online. Managers use frequent visits to employers and subcontractors to reinforce the importance of safeguarding.
- Staff cover health and safety and safeguarding in detail during learners' induction. Most learners develop their knowledge of safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty effectively during their time at ACE Training. Well-trained staff revisit safeguarding and test learning during reviews and in lessons. However, a small minority of learners have a superficial knowledge of British values and how to keep safe from radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Well-qualified and experienced staff inspire and motivate most learners. They link practical and theoretical knowledge successfully to employers' expectations. Learners develop high-quality practical skills, particularly within brickwork. Apprentices find their developing skills and knowledge useful when back in their workplaces.
- Staff have high expectations of their learners' practical work. Teachers help learners understand quickly that they need to perfect their construction skills. Teachers aspire to professional standards, and most learners achieve this aim. Learners receive useful and

detailed feedback on their practical work. This helps them to make fast progress in developing these skills.

- Teachers and assessors assess accurately the starting points of learners. This allows them to place learners on the correct courses. Staff use a relevant and carefully planned induction to make sure that learners understand what they need to do in their courses. They make sure that learners know about assessment requirements. Learners know what to expect during their learning. Most of them stay on their courses to complete their qualifications.
- Learners benefit from teaching staff who are both experts in their vocational areas and qualified teachers. Teachers know their subjects in detail. They keep up to date with legal requirements such as health and safety legislation and industry knowledge. They expect learners to meet professional standards. Learners react positively to the expertise of staff. They enjoy their learning.
- Teachers check learning carefully in practical lessons. They make sure that learners understand how to develop and perfect their practical construction skills. Learners are keen to improve. They question staff and their peers to enhance their knowledge. However, not enough teachers on study programmes use questioning effectively enough to stretch and challenge more able learners.
- Staff know their learners well. They identify those falling behind quickly and plan appropriately to help them to get back on track. Staff work outside timetabled lessons to support learners who need more help. They encourage learners to use the well-equipped workshops to practise with industry-standard resources. Functional skills teachers help learners with written work and prepare them fully for interviews. Apprentices who fall behind attend increased amounts of off-the-job training to catch up.
- Teachers create useful resources that help learners understand construction topics. Functional skills teachers design resources which help learners of all abilities to make fast progress. They use discussions and debates effectively to assist learners to develop their communication skills.
- Not enough learners receive useful feedback from staff to help them understand how to improve their written work. Too few teachers mark written work carefully enough to show errors. Feedback to learners is often generic or very basic. Teachers and assessors do not highlight spelling and grammatical mistakes in written work. As a result, learners do not develop their English skills sufficiently.
- In theory lessons, teachers and assessors do not always plan in enough detail to meet the needs of different study programme learners. Too often, learners work on the same activity, regardless of their differing abilities. Teachers do not challenge more able learners with more difficult work. Consequently, learners in these lessons make slower progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Many learners come to ACE Training not having succeeded in previous education. They learn new skills, develop their practical work in construction to a high level and gain in confidence. This helps them find employment, move to apprenticeships or access further learning. Learners are hard-working and polite. They work together effectively in the

workshops and classrooms. They develop a very positive attitude to work.

- Staff expect high standards of behaviour, and learners behave admirably. Learners quickly develop very positive attitudes to work. Staff are quick to challenge stereotypical or derogatory language and attitudes. Learners develop good levels of respect for their peers, clients and staff. They integrate into busy worksites quickly.
- Learners receive comprehensive careers guidance which prepares them well for their next steps. Staff talk with learners in detail about opportunities in construction. Study programme learners receive comprehensive information about apprenticeships. Staff arrange useful trips for learners to skills fairs, local work sites and careers events. Learners value the helpful advice on wider aspects of personal development, such as improving verbal communication, developing confidence and coping with the transition to the world of work.
- Staff monitor learners' behaviour and welfare closely. They help learners, many of whom have had disrupted schooling or chaotic lives, to develop a 'can do' attitude to learning and work. Managers provide financial help and minibus transport to support those younger learners who need help getting to the training centre.
- Learners improve their knowledge of topics such as customer care and diversity during effective discussions and debates with staff. They learn how to work with people of different cultures. Learners find out about the impact of online trade websites where customers rate and leave feedback on their work. Consequently, most learners understand the importance of good customer care.
- Almost all learners value their training and attend punctually. They arrive at the training centre and their workplaces fully prepared for a full day's work. Attendance is high. Almost two thirds of current study programme learners have not missed any training. Apprentices arrive at work on time, work hard and make a strong contribution to their employer's business.
- Learners develop good team-working skills through realistic work tasks and community projects. They work confidently and with increased independence with other tradespeople. They are proud of the practical work they complete. Apprentices take pride in the skills they contribute to the workplace.
- Learners develop the mathematical skills they need for successful employment. Staff embed effective learning about numeracy into almost all workshop and classroom lessons. Learners recognise the importance of accuracy when setting out and building their models during training and when in the workplace. They interpret site drawings accurately. They understand the principles of scale, ratios and percentages.
- Learners and apprentices have good access to a suite of computers, which they use effectively to research their written work. However, not enough learners and apprentices develop their information and communications technology (ICT) skills during their time at ACE Training.
- Staff do not develop learners' written English skills sufficiently. Too few teachers and assessors identify errors in learners' sentence or paragraph structure, grammar or spelling. Staff do not give learners enough advice on how to improve these topics.
- Managers do not give enough details about learners' progress to parents, carers or employers. They do not report learners' progress in developing skills, knowledge and

behaviours. Employers are well informed about those apprentices who are falling behind. However, most do not get enough feedback about learners who are making good progress. Employers of apprentices at the Engineering Trust receive much more detailed information about the progress that their apprentices are making.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Learners and apprentices develop valuable practical construction skills during their time at ACE Training. These skills prepare them well for their next steps. Those on brickwork courses produce work of a particularly high standard, as do apprentices at the Engineering Trust.
- Study programme learners and apprentices enjoy their learning. Most learners on study programmes and all apprentices who started in 2018 are still on their courses.
- Learners make good progress in developing their skills in construction lessons. Almost all current apprentices are on track to achieve their apprenticeship by their planned end date. Over half the study programme learners who started in 2018 have already achieved a work-related qualification.
- Most study programme learners move on to apprenticeships, further education or employment. In 2017/18, just under half of the learners on study programmes progressed to apprenticeships. The large majority of these stayed with ACE Training. Although leaders and managers track learners' next steps in detail, they do not analyse destination information in enough detail to check the strengths and weaknesses of study programmes.
- Substantially more study programme learners achieve a work-related qualification than at the time of the previous inspection. However, too many learners still leave their courses without these qualifications. Around half the learners who started in 2017/18 gained an entry-level qualification in a construction subject, a considerable increase on the previous year. More current learners have already achieved a work-related qualification than at the same time last year.
- Leaders and managers analyse achievement data in detail to make sure that there are no gaps between different groups of learners. They check to see that no learners are disadvantaged because of where they live. Where they do identify concerns, they act quickly to deal with these.
- Apprentices achieve their English and mathematics qualifications quickly. Most of those who started in 2017/18, and around half of recent starters, have already achieved these qualifications.
- Many more study programme learners achieved their English and mathematics qualifications in 2017/18 than in previous years. However, too few learners leave their study programme having gained these qualifications. Current study programme learners are making much better progress on English and mathematics courses than at the same time the previous year.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Around 50 learners follow a study programme created specifically as a pre-apprenticeship course. All learners take entry-level qualifications in either carpentry or brickwork to improve their construction skills. They also study English and mathematics and develop their knowledge of the world of work. They then progress to level 1 certificates and diplomas in work-related subjects. Staff encourage study programme learners to move on to apprenticeships or employment once they have the required skills, even if this means that they do not complete their current qualification.
- Leaders and managers plan and manage study programmes effectively. Staff have extended and improved induction procedures since the previous inspection. They have increased the emphasis on practical learning. They concentrate more on developing learners' personal skills and improving work-readiness. This results in learners starting on the correct programmes and staying on their courses.
- Staff use their knowledge of the construction industry to engage and stimulate most learners. They plan practical lessons in detail. They use information about learners' prior skills and knowledge to plan interesting and stimulating lessons that develop learners' construction skills effectively. In a small minority of theoretical lessons, teaching is less inspiring and the pace of learning is slow.
- Learners respect their teachers and respond well to feedback on their practical work. They develop high-quality industry skills. They make particularly fast progress in bricklaying. For example, learners were able to build an English bond garden wall to a high standard after only six weeks of training. They describe the reasons for building cavity walls and construction techniques using industry terminology.
- Learners are respectful, polite and keen to learn. They develop valuable social and communication skills. They learn about and understand British values. Most know how to identify and report signs of radicalisation in others. Learners develop their independence and group work skills admirably.
- Teaching staff carry out comprehensive, frequent and effective reviews of progress with learners. They discuss in detail the quality of learners' work. They carefully review learners' development of skills, attendance and enjoyment of the course. Although learners complete action plans because of this feedback, staff do not set clear enough targets for learners to help them understand the steps they need to take next.
- Staff motivate learners well to pursue a career in the construction industry. They use their professional knowledge and strong links with carpentry and bricklaying companies to improve learners' access to, and understanding of, employment. They work closely with learners to prepare them effectively for job applications and apprenticeships.
- Learners benefit from their involvement in a variety of community-based, work-related and enterprise activities. They all complete high-quality health and safety training and learn about first aid in the workplace. They repair the fabric of the training centre and carrying out building repairs for clients. All learners gain their construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card while studying. At Synolos, learners develop their digital and money-handling skills by making products that they sell online.
- Learners improve their understanding of the world of work while at ACE Training. All learners complete a useful mixture of work-related learning, work placements and actual

site experience. For example, bricklaying learners visit a local construction site and receive a full induction with the site health and safety manager. They then tour the site to experience what a professional work environment is like. However, learners do not record or evaluate the skills, knowledge and behaviours they develop during periods of work-related learning or work experience. Consequently, they are unsure how to improve their skills.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Just over 50 learners follow apprenticeship courses, with almost all studying on frameworks at level 2. A small number of apprentices study at level 3. Those at ACE Training follow apprenticeships in carpentry and joinery and brickwork. A small number of learners take engineering apprenticeships at a nearby subcontractor, the Engineering Trust.
- Teachers and assessors use their extensive industry knowledge and expertise to support apprentices well. Apprentices develop good construction skills quickly. This helps them to contribute usefully to their workplaces. They gain a detailed knowledge of construction and improve their practical skills rapidly.
- Apprentices receive valuable on- and off-the-job training. Staff work closely with employers to make sure that training is relevant to their workplaces. For example, employers noted that apprentices were struggling to fit architraves and hang doors accurately. Staff made sure that apprentices developed these skills during practical lessons so that they could complete these tasks effectively at work.
- Employers value the flexible approach staff have developed regarding off-the-job training. Staff work closely with employers to encourage apprentices to attend the training centre to continue their work on days when work sites are inaccessible. Employers understand that they can call on apprentices to work more hours when large jobs need completing. Staff arrange for any apprentices who have missed off-the-job training to attend the training centre on extra days to catch up. Almost all apprentices are on track to complete their apprenticeship by the planned end date.
- Apprentices gain valuable additional qualifications that improve their work skills and employability. Engineering apprentices gain their performing engineering operations (PEO) qualification and qualifications in setting out machinery. Carpentry apprentices study further units in joinery which give them extra practical skills. For example, one employer needed apprentices to learn about bespoke joinery topics, such as the restoration of a twisted staircase. Staff added new modules to apprentices' training plans to allow them to gain the relevant skills to complete this work.
- Staff at ACE Training and employers support apprentices well with their next steps. These are usually to sustained employment or self-employment. Staff at the Engineering Trust help apprentices to move into higher education after they have completed their apprenticeship.
- Apprentices are proud of the skills that they develop during their apprenticeship. They become more confident about how to operate in the workplace. They develop their independence and learn how to be an effective team member. Employers hold the skills that they develop during their apprenticeships in high regard.

- Staff support the small number of apprentices at the Engineering Trust who are on new engineering standards apprenticeships very effectively. They make sure that employers understand the new standards and the behaviours required by apprentices. Staff help apprentices develop a wide range of effective behaviours from all engineering standards apprenticeships. This helps them to become flexible and skilled workers.
- Staff know their apprentices and recognise quickly any changes in their behaviour. They hold frequent team meetings, where they identify those at risk of falling behind. They support these apprentices successfully. Apprentices at the Engineering Trust benefit from particularly strong support.
- Brickwork apprentices receive detailed and useful feedback on their work which explains how they can improve. Feedback to apprentices at the Engineering Trust is frequent, thorough and well recorded. As a result, most apprentices know the progress they are making and how to develop their work. However, not enough carpentry apprentices benefit from the same level of response from staff. Consequently, apprentices in this area know less about how well they are doing or what to improve.
- Apprentices know how to stay safe. They wear the correct personal protective equipment and know how to work safely, both at work and in lessons. They discuss and debate a range of topics such as equality, British values and radicalisation and extremism during reviews. Although most develop their knowledge successfully, a few apprentices do not understand sufficiently how they apply to their work and personal lives.
- A few assessors do not set clear enough targets for apprentices. They concentrate too much on completing units rather than setting challenging targets to develop apprentices' skills and knowledge.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59109
Type of provider	Not-for-profit organisation
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	71
Principal/CEO	Adam Marsh
Telephone number	01865 370040
Website	www.acetraining.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)	53	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	37	12	3	2	-	-		
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	10							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	The Engineering Trust Synolos							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the operations director, 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

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