

# Acacia Training and Development Limited

Interim visit report

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<b>Unique reference number:</b>	50303
<b>Name of lead inspector:</b>	Tracey Zimmerman, Her Majesty's Inspector
<b>Visit dates:</b>	8 to 9 December 2020
<b>Type of provider:</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Address:</b>	The Training Centre 10 Sawrey Street Milbay Plymouth PL1 3LA

## Interim visit

### Context and focus of visit

On 17 March 2020, all routine inspections were suspended due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As part of our phased return to routine inspections, we are carrying out 'interim visits' to further education and skills providers. Interim visits are to help learners, parents, employers and government understand how providers are meeting the needs of learners and apprentices in this period, including those with high needs and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The focus of these visits is on the themes set out below and the findings are based on discussions with leaders, managers, staff and learners.

### Information about the provider

Acacia Training and Development Limited (Acacia) became part of BCE Group Ltd in October 2020. BCE Group Ltd recently installed a new management team. Acacia has 492 learners across the south-west, mostly located in Devon and Somerset. The large majority of apprentices work in health and social care, or childcare. At the time of the visit, there were 53 apprentices between 16 and 18 years of age and 150 apprentices over 19 years of age. Acacia subcontracts a small proportion of its apprenticeship provision in refrigeration and childcare courses. Most apprentices study level 2 or level 3 courses, with a smaller number studying at level 4 and 5.

Acacia mostly provides short courses for 288 adults in Plymouth, in subjects such as business, and health and social care. Acacia also offers courses to help people who are unemployed to gain skills and find work.

### **What actions are leaders taking to ensure that they provide an appropriate curriculum that responds to the reasonable needs of learners and stakeholders and adapts to changed circumstances?**

At the start of the pandemic, staff used a range of methods to keep in contact with learners and apprentices. This included tutorials by telephone and posting work to learners. The majority of learners studying on employability courses and 30 apprentices had their training paused during the first lockdown.

The main priority for managers reopening after the first lockdown was to help their vulnerable learners, such as those on employability courses, to return to learning. Managers also prioritised the return of apprentices who needed their assessors to undertake observations of their performance and prepare them for their final assessments.

The new management team took over just before the second lockdown. Their main priority was supporting learners' and staff welfare. They also introduced digital teaching,

learning and assessment systems and platforms, to provide a more consistent approach to remote learning.

The new leaders are keen to focus on delivering learning in sectors in which they have expertise, such as health and social care and early years education. They are restructuring their programmes to teach small groups of learners online, with just a few learners attending in person.

Leaders report that recruitment for employability courses and apprenticeships declined during the spring term. It is now improving for health and childcare apprenticeships. Staff regularly contact learners waiting to start courses to discuss their options.

Leaders are aware of the need to communicate more regularly with employers about the progress their apprentices are making. They state that they need to monitor subcontractors more closely.

Staff tell us that new leaders have swiftly implemented changes to the organisation; they feel positive about these changes and the level of support which leaders provide.

**What steps are leaders, managers and staff taking to ensure that the approaches used for building knowledge and skills are appropriate to meet the reasonable needs of learners?**

Teachers taught very few courses online during the first lockdown. This was due to Acacia not having the technological infrastructure and teachers not having the skills to teach remotely. New leaders have now arranged training for staff in using online platforms to teach and assess learning.

Many learners are behind in their studies. Some childcare learners were furloughed at the start of the pandemic and employability learners did not feel confident using public transport to get to training centres. Staff are working with these learners to help them catch up with learning and stay motivated to complete their qualifications.

Managers recognise that some learners may need face-to-face training in digital skills before they can access learning online. Leaders are working with employers and local charities to make sure that learners have access to information technology to learn remotely.

Managers are working with staff to understand what progress learners are making. They told us that the new progress monitoring systems, when fully populated, will give them an accurate picture of the progress made by all learners. Currently, managers discuss learners' progress at monthly caseload review meetings, putting together action plans to help learners achieve their qualifications, if necessary. Learners' attendance declined during the first lockdown but is now improving. Learners who miss face-to-face sessions are offered additional online sessions to help them catch up with their work. Managers recognise that too many learners are not completing their courses within the expected timeframes.

All the learners we spoke to enjoy their courses with Acacia. Apprentices said they learn skills in the order they need for work. Staff tell us that in health and social care apprentices are much more confident and resilient due to their work during the pandemic. Assessors and tutors provide careers advice informally in sessions, but leaders are developing a more formal system.

### **How are leaders ensuring that learners are safe and well informed about potential risks, including from online sources?**

Managers assessed all learners attending classes in Plymouth and put plans in place to mitigate their risks from COVID-19 (coronavirus). Through lockdown, tutors regularly contacted vulnerable learners to check on their welfare and support them back into learning.

Staff report they do not teach online safety in sufficient detail. Managers have planned online safety training for staff, so they can better support learners to understand potential risks online. Leaders are currently reviewing the curriculum to ensure it includes all aspects of safeguarding, including online safety.

Leaders also plan to train staff to better understand their roles and responsibilities relating to safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. Leaders have put in place a monthly safeguarding meeting to help staff access local safeguarding information and standardise their approach to dealing with incidents. Learners have a clear understanding of who to contact if they have any concerns.

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