

Abacus Training Group

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Abacus Training Group was inspected in May 2019. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

During periods of lockdown, learners continued their education online. Since the easing of restrictions in March 2021, leaders have reopened the training centre to provide face-to-face lessons.

The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been taken into account in the findings and progress judgements below.

Themes

How much progress have leaders and managers made in monitoring and improving learners' attendance and progress? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have successfully implemented tracking systems that enable them to monitor the attendance and progress of learners. Tutor assessors track the progress of learners and provide leaders with weekly feedback reports. Reports include detailed reasons for absence, such as childcare as a result of COVID-19, and actions taken to enable learners to maintain their learning at home. Leaders and managers scrutinise these records and challenge tutor assessors to ensure all learners receive the support they need to achieve. The majority of learners make good progress in their learning and achieve their qualifications within planned timescales.

Managers and tutor assessors are supportive of their learners, who confide concerns and issues they may have that impact their attendance and their progress. A small minority of learners have had to take alternative employment as a result of COVID-19, for example working night shifts in a care home. Tutor assessors support learners to make progress in these changed situations. They offer alternative arrangements for attending the training centre or provide hard copies of learning and assessment resources enabling learners to learn at times convenient to them. As a result, learners remain engaged in the learning and make progress towards their qualifications.

How much progress have leaders and managers made in improving learners' mathematics and English skills? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have developed vocationally relevant learning resources that support the development of learners' English and mathematical skills. For example, scenarios assist learners to develop the skills required for budget management, stock control and pricing treatments.

Tutor assessors support learners to develop their technical vocational language. They break down complex terms, such as decrustation and iontophoresis, enabling learners to learn tongue position, mouth movement and practise pronunciation. Learners who speak English as an additional language develop their speaking skills.

Tutor assessors facilitate role play activities that enable learners to apply their learning and develop their professional communication skills. For example, they participate in activities that simulate client and therapist consultations. This develops learners' confidence in discussing clients' requirements and applying their recently acquired knowledge to meet clients' needs.

Leaders and managers identify all learners' starting points in English and mathematics before they commence their studies. However, tutor assessors do not use this information well enough to address the gaps that some learners have in their English and mathematical skills. For example, tutor assessors do not support learners to develop identified skills such as capitalisation and punctuation.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to ensure that tutors use information about learners' prior knowledge to plan learning that meets learners' individual needs? Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have effectively adapted the information they gather on learners' prior knowledge and experience. This enables them to assess the suitability of learners for courses and helps learners to make an informed decision about their studies.

Tutor assessors use the information carefully to plan programmes of learning that enable learners to develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to progress in their careers. Beauty learners benefit from effective, personalised support and feedback. For example, tutor assessors provide learners with strategies that help them to develop their client communication skills and confidence. However, tutor assessors do not always ensure targets are set in a timely manner.

Tutor assessors adapt the curriculum to enable those with prior knowledge and experience to complete their practical assessments earlier. Tutor assessors support learners to extend their knowledge by learning about trends in treatments and services offered in spas and larger salons. Tutor assessors use information, advice and guidance effectively to increase learners' awareness of their career options and where they might be able to use their advanced skills.

How much progress have leaders and managers made to improve the quality of feedback tutor assessors provide to learners to support them improve their work? Reasonable progress

Tutor assessors provide frequent and helpful feedback to support learners to improve their theoretical knowledge and vocational skills. Tutor assessors use awarding body documentation to record feedback but do not provide learners with a copy. Consequently, learners do not have a record that they can revisit and recall what they have learned.

Learners working towards beauty courses benefit from particularly helpful feedback. Tutor assessors' feedback covers the vocational knowledge, skills and behaviours that learners need to develop. They refer to previous feedback to reflect on prior learning. They use the feedback to enable learners to understand improvements made, such as increased pace in delivering a treatment, or the maintenance of skills such as thumb kneading and rolls.

Tutor assessors use assessments to test learners' knowledge and understanding of key concepts. Learners on nail technician courses learn about the skin and nails, including common conditions such as onychorrhexis and leukonychia. However, too often, tutor assessors' feedback on assessment is affirmative and too brief. Consequently, learners do not benefit from any challenge to check their understanding.

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