

Inspection of Alpha Care Agency Limited

Inspection dates: 14 to 17 September 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education	Requires improvement
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Requires improvement
Leadership and management	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Information about this provider

Alpha Care Agency, trading as Alpha Gateway College (AGC), is an independent learning provider based in the London Borough of Haringey. Most learners are on health and social care apprenticeships, with a small amount of provision funded by advanced learner loans in 2020/21. All apprentices are aged 19 or over.

At the time of the inspection, 121 apprentices were on standards-based apprenticeships in health and social care from level 2 to level 5. Of these, 69 apprentices study the level 3 lead adult care worker course. A further 205 apprentices study framework apprenticeships at level 2, level 3 children's care, learning and development, level 5 care leadership and management, and level 3 information technology (IT) and telecoms professional. There were no loans-funded learners in learning at the time of the inspection, and 19 learners, mostly on business management courses, in the 2020/21 academic year.

At the start of the pandemic, apprentices' learning was severely affected because of increased workloads in the care sector. The impact of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has been considered in the findings below.

What is it like to be a learner with this provider?

Apprentices benefit from strong relationships with their assessors. On IT and telecoms courses, apprentices appreciate that they can contact assessors easily by email or telephone. Assessors respond quickly with helpful advice. As a result, apprentices remain motivated to stay on the course when faced with challenges at work.

In a few cases, apprentices do not receive the time they need to complete their studies. Leaders do not plan quickly enough how apprentices will take their time away from work to complete their training. This means that these apprentices complete their coursework in their own time.

Apprentices value the knowledge and skills they learn that help them progress at work. Apprentices apply these effectively in their job roles. For example, apprentices on the leadership and management for adult care courses competently take on new responsibilities, such as testing staff for COVID-19. However, apprentices do not receive sufficient information to help them understand the career options open to them. They are also not informed adequately about other options, such as progressing to university.

Apprentices feel safe when learning online. They like the one-to-one support assessors give them. They feel able to approach staff with their worries or concerns because they know that staff care about them and their welfare.

What does the provider do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed a clear vision for the curriculum that is focused on providing apprenticeships to employers in the care sector. Leaders work closely with employers to plan the curriculum appropriately to meet their needs where there are skills shortages. The majority of employers in the care sector value the effective relationship they have with leaders.

Leaders, managers and assessors do not accurately identify learners' and apprentices' starting points. For example, learners who studied the level 3 business administration course struggle to talk in detail about the knowledge and skills they have learned that would help them set up their own business. Leaders fail to provide the specific support that learners with low levels of spoken English need. These learners do not develop quickly enough their written and spoken English to a level appropriate for the course they are on.

Too often, assessors' feedback on apprentices' work is superficial. For example, assessors limit their feedback to saying only whether an apprentice has met, or not met, the unit criteria. They fail to include information that helps apprentices correct misunderstandings. Consequently, apprentices do not know the steps they need to take to raise the standard of their work.

Leaders do not ensure that assessors teach apprentices well enough about appropriately referencing sources of research in their assessments. In IT and telecoms courses, a few apprentices copy work directly from the internet without stating the source.

Leaders do not ensure that assessors give feedback in progress reviews that is focused sufficiently on the specific development needs of individual apprentices. In a few reviews, assessors gave the same comments about apprentices' progress to different apprentices without considering their individual circumstances.

Leaders ensure that the curriculum is suitably structured. For example, in IT and telecoms courses, apprentices start by learning about relevant health and safety topics. Apprentices then choose specific units related to their job role priorities, such as developing a website. As a result, apprentices gradually develop useful knowledge and skills for their work.

Leaders support assessors well to undertake appropriate training that helps them acquire new teaching skills. For example, new tutors gain qualifications in assessment practices. Leaders provide useful feedback to assessors on how to plan effective lessons. However, this has not led to a consistently high level of quality of education across all subject areas.

Assessors teach apprentices effectively to understand concepts of the rule of law and the values of mutual respect. Assessors lead lively group discussions about topics such as the importance of joining a queue in the right place. Apprentices confidently debate how and to whom they would offer a seat on public transport. As a result, apprentices develop their personal and social skills, which helps them in their roles as carers.

Leaders and managers have put steps in place to monitor accurately apprentices' progress through the course. Leaders identified well those apprentices who fell behind with their learning during the pandemic and are now helping them to catch up. Consequently, the majority of apprentices are on track to complete their apprenticeship within reasonable timescales.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have established a governing board. Members of the board provide helpful advice to leaders, particularly on matters relating to financial management and education. However, board members do not receive sufficiently detailed information about learners' progress on the course. As a result, they cannot accurately identify where the key strengths and weaknesses exist.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders follow closely the safeguarding commitments written in their policies.

Leaders provide staff with relevant annual training in safeguarding and the 'Prevent' duty. They undertake a range of appropriate pre-employment checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work in the care sector.

The designated safeguarding leads keep useful information on local organisations to which they can refer apprentices for further advice. These include organisations that offer support on domestic abuse, elder abuse, and sexual violence and harassment.

Assessors teach apprentices effectively how to recognise the signs of abuse in their clients. They understand well the different approaches to keeping adults and children safe in their work.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that staff accurately assess apprentices' prior learning and develop learning plans that meet apprentices' individual learning needs.
- Leaders should ensure that assessors are suitably trained to give apprentices feedback on their written work so that apprentices deepen their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they study.
- Leaders should continue to support the development of assessors' teaching skills so that the quality of education is consistently high across all subjects.
- Leaders should better identify apprentices' additional learning needs, including their use of English, and provide sufficient support so that learners overcome any barriers in their studies.
- Leaders should improve the accuracy and reliability of information provided to governors so that they can effectively challenge leaders on learners' progress, and their attendance and achievement.

Provider details

Unique reference number	58538
Address	Tottenham Town Hall Town Hall Approach London N15 4RY
Contact number	020 8527 1627
Website	www.agcollege.co.uk
CEO	Audrey Soyam
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 March 2018
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the lead internal quality assurance officer, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. The inspection was carried out using the [further education and skills inspection handbook](#) and took into account all relevant provision at the provider. Inspectors collected a wide range of evidence to inform judgements, including visiting learning sessions, scrutinising learners' work, seeking the views of learners, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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