

# Inspection of Acacia Training and Development Ltd

Inspection dates:

21–24 September 2021

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Apprenticeships

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

## Information about this provider

Acacia Training and Development Ltd (ATD) became part of the BCE group Ltd in October 2020. ATD is an independent training provider, now offering only apprenticeships, which operates across the south-west of England. Most apprentices are 24 years of age or older, working in health and social care or early years settings. A very small number of apprentices are working in business administration. Acacia subcontracts a small proportion of its apprenticeship provision in childcare to Flying Start Limited, based in Cornwall.

At the time of the inspection, ATD had 185 apprentices. Of these, 47 were studying level 2 programmes in health and social care and 13 in early years. Ninety-five apprentices were studying level 3 programmes, 50 in health and social care, 33 in early years and 12 on a business administration apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices gain and retain employment as adult care or early years workers as a result of the curriculums they follow. However, apprentices who have been studying their apprenticeship for some time are frustrated by the sometimes very slow progress they have made towards completing it. Leaders have struggled to maintain contact with these apprentices due to changes in assessors and other operational challenges exacerbated by the pandemic. Apprentices who have started their programme in the past six months or so are generally making better progress on their programmes.

Most apprentices are motivated to succeed in and complete their courses. They develop a positive attitude towards their learning. Most can recognise how their professional practice and skills in communicating with others, both in adult care and early years settings, have grown.

Most apprentices are developing new knowledge, skills and behaviours as a result of their apprenticeship, but not always to the best of their ability. Even so, employers value the contributions that apprentices are making to their business. For example, employers in adult care settings report that apprentices are applying good practice to improve the quality of care for their clients.

Apprentices feel safe. They adhere to required health and safety practices at work. Apprentices feel they are treated fairly and respectfully and demonstrate high levels of respect for their assessors and their peers.

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

Leaders have been working closely and effectively with local authorities and external agencies to devise a curriculum which meets local and regional employment needs. As a result, it is filling skills gaps in the adult care and early years sectors. Nonetheless, too many apprentices struggle to explain how their apprenticeship is helping them develop wider knowledge, skills and behaviours beyond the minimum expectations of the qualification. Staff are not using the outcomes of assessments at the start of the learning programmes effectively, to identify what apprentices already know and can do before they start their course. This means apprentices are not achieving their full potential. Leaders have not maintained sufficient oversight of its small sub-contract of early years apprentices. These apprentices have experienced unnecessary delays in completing their end point assessments.

In recent months, leaders have introduced new policies and procedures aimed at improving apprentices' progress and the quality of training and support. However, leaders and governors recognise that the impact of these initiatives varies too much between different groups of apprentices. For example, most of the more recent starters are now making at least reasonable progress as a result of regular and frequent contact with their designated assessor from the outset. Assessors now hold monthly workshops, and any apprentices who have fallen behind can attend one-to-

one weekly sessions, which help them catch up. However, many who have been on the programme for around a year or more still have much ground to make up. Leaders did not ensure that the very small number of business administration apprentices received any tuition or support in recent months. Around half have since left their programme. Employers note that communication between them and provider staff has improved in recent months. However, not all employers are fully involved in the design of the curriculum, nor are they all kept closely informed about apprentices' progress.

Most apprentices have high aspirations for their future careers but only a basic understanding of the career opportunities available to them once they have completed their training. This is because staff are not providing formal and impartial careers information and advice sessions. This means apprentices do not know how to move on to different careers or higher education. For example, apprentices on adult care apprenticeships are unclear about how to progress to specialist roles such as end of life, nursing or dementia care.

Leaders' planning and scheduling of the functional skills curriculum are not linked effectively to apprentices' programmes of learning. Adult care apprentices who have been on their programme for several months have not received any teaching in English and mathematics.

Due mainly to pandemic-related staffing issues, most adult care and early years apprentices have not been able to conduct off-the-job training. They then struggle to complete coursework and research in their own time. This means that too many are then falling behind. Assessors do not all set high expectations for apprentices' attendance at online learning sessions or reviews and in a few cases are not chasing non-attendance. Too many apprentices have had their online training sessions cancelled or have not been able to attend them due to pressures of work.

Apprentices have little knowledge about how to work online safely, and they recognise the signs of domestic violence, bullying or sexual harassment. Most have either yet to discuss these topics or if they have, remember little of substance about them.

Leaders have sensibly reduced the curriculum offer to ensure that it matches the expertise and resources of their training team. Tutors and assessors are knowledgeable, qualified and experienced in the sectors they teach. They provide examples relevant to apprentices' workplaces and clients' requirements when training. This improves apprentices' understanding of topics including manual handling and personal care. As a result, apprentices are gaining the skills essential to do their jobs well.

Assessors and tutors use explanation and questioning well to check learning, and they teach theoretical elements of the curriculum in a logical manner. The training is linked closely to apprentices' job roles and workplaces, and highlights the associated behaviours or skills required. Once apprentices develop a sound understanding of key principles in a variety of settings, they move on to more workplace-specific

learning, such as dementia care. However, a few assessors and tutors do not check apprentices' knowledge and understanding thoroughly enough before moving on to the next topic. Staff value the ongoing support they have received from leaders to develop their teaching practice but recognise they have more to learn.

ATD staff promote equality of opportunity well. They make reasonable adjustments to their teaching and assessment methods. This ensures apprentices with specific learning difficulties and vulnerable learners are not put at a disadvantage and their needs are met appropriately. For example, staff have ensured that apprentices with learning difficulties such as dyslexia can use suitable resources to enable them to learn and make progress. Assessors record professional discussions for those who struggle with writing to ensure they keep up to date with learning.

Employers value the workplace skills and positive behaviours that apprentices are developing. Most apprentices studying the level 3 adult care programme have become more confident in supporting their colleagues, inducting new colleagues into jobs and passing on new knowledge. A few have gained more responsibility, such as moving from a health assistant to a team leader role. Early years apprentices use their new knowledge and understanding well and have grown in confidence. For example, they are able to communicate fluently to the parents or carers of a child the progress that their child is making.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

Leaders and managers have implemented appropriate policies and procedures that staff use effectively in order to safeguard apprentices. Managers use their good links with local external agencies to ensure that safeguarding policies are kept up to date. The designated safeguarding and deputy safeguarding lead are experienced and have received appropriate training to carry out their roles. Leaders complete the necessary checks when recruiting and appointing new staff.

Apprentices feel safe. They understand the importance of providing a safe environment for those they are responsible for. For example, apprentices in early years settings have a strong understanding of safeguarding children in their care. Adult care apprentices reflect on their own practice of letting others know of their whereabouts when lone working in order to ensure their own safety.

## **What does the provider need to do to improve?**

- Leaders should closely monitor the progress that apprentices make in order that they complete their programmes on time.
- Leaders should ensure that assessors and tutors accurately identify apprentices' starting points and use this information to tailor an ambitious curriculum for each one.

- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices experience off-the-job training so that they can apply and consolidate what they learn off-the-job while in work.
- Leaders should ensure that apprentices receive formal and impartial careers information, advice and guidance so that they have a clear idea of their career options, particularly apprentices in the adult care sector.
- Leaders should link the planning and scheduling of the functional skills curriculum to the apprenticeship programme in order for apprentices to develop and practice their English and mathematics skills.

## Provider details

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>      | 50303  |
| <b>Address</b>                      | Room 41<br>235 Union Street<br>Stonehouse<br>Plymouth<br>PL1 3HN |
| <b>Contact number</b>               | 01275 876 733  |
| <b>Website</b>                      | <a href="http://www.acacia.ac.uk">www.acacia.ac.uk</a>           |
| <b>Principal/CEO</b>                | Alison Webber  |
| <b>Provider type</b>                | Independent learning provider                                    |
| <b>Dates of previous inspection</b> | 12–13 March 2018   |
| <b>Subcontractor</b>                | Flying Start Nurseries   |

## 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. 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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