

Inspection of Accountancy Learning Ltd

Inspection dates: 5–7 October 2021

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this provider

Accountancy Learning Ltd. was established in January 2012. Its head office is in Exeter, with two additional centres in Plymouth and Taunton. Its original purpose was to offer distance learning courses in accountancy on a commercial basis. This strand of work continues.

Since April 2017, Accountancy Learning Ltd has also offered apprenticeship programmes. Initially, these were at levels 3 and 4, but now include programmes at levels 2 and 7. All apprenticeships are standards-based. There are currently 45 apprentices studying the level 2 accounts/finance assistant programme; 81 apprentices are studying to become level 3 assistant accountants; 45 apprentices are studying for the level 4 professional accounting technician qualification and 15 are studying the level 7 accountancy/taxation professional programme. A very small number are also studying functional skills qualifications in English and/or mathematics as part of their apprenticeship.

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

Apprentices enjoy their training with Accountancy Learning Ltd. They value and benefit from the up-to-date specialist knowledge and skills their tutors incorporate in training sessions.

Apprentices are very motivated to succeed. They demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning and model the expected professional behaviours from early on in their apprenticeships. Apprentices become more enthusiastic about taking on more responsibility at work as their learning deepens. As their confidence, knowledge and resilience grow, they start to work more directly and independently with clients.

Apprentices appreciate the flexibility and variety of the off-the-job learning they can access. This includes one-to-one sessions, online 'drop-in' sessions and research using plentiful online resources. They work with new technologies and develop the skills to work effectively with others and independently. However, a minority of apprentices would prefer to be taught primarily through face-to-face group sessions, particularly at key parts of their learning, to help extend their learning and to learn from their peers.

Apprentices feel safe while studying and at work. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and know how to report any concerns. They benefit from the very frequent contact with their tutor. Apprentices are confident that any concerns they raise would be dealt with promptly. Tutors support apprentices directly with practical strategies, such as how to deal with an aggressive client or colleague, as well as making referrals for mental health support.

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

Leaders have developed niche apprenticeship curriculums specialising in accountancy. The increase in the number and level of apprenticeships offered is prompted by local employer demand. Leaders liaise frequently with local and regional employers to review and develop the provision. The curriculums are relevant and flexible, meeting employers' business needs. Employer's value this specialist provision highly because their apprentices make significant contributions to their business from an early stage of their learning.

Apprentices benefit greatly from their ready access to tutors' up-to-date sector-specific knowledge and skills. Leaders and tutors work hard to keep themselves abreast of current trends and techniques in the accountancy sector through their business links, and involvement in relevant regional networks and professional bodies. For example, one senior manager is currently President of the local Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales and uses this experience to ensure that tutors are aware of the challenges and current sector issues.

Leaders and tutors set high standards for the quality and depth of apprentices' work. Apprentices at all levels can explain clearly what they are learning during their off-the-job training and how it helps them at work. Apprentices studying at level 3 can describe their increased proficiency in dealing with value-added tax (VAT) at work. Level 4 apprentices can describe the improved analytical skills they apply to analysing management accounts. Level 7 apprentices apply their new performance management learning when managing junior members of their team.

Apprentices are exceptionally well-supported, and they feel tutors care about them, their well-being, and their progress. Tutors spend extra time with apprentices to provide guidance on topics they may not have understood fully, so they are ready to move to the next stage of learning. Tutors adapt the ordering of topics taught to ensure that apprentices' new learning matches their employers' business needs. For example, apprentices studying at level 3 have been taught about VAT returns at a time of year when clients are most likely to need such work completed.

Tutors assess apprentices' work frequently. Apprentices value the concise written feedback they receive about how to improve their work. This includes tutors' clear identification of errors on progress tests. Tutors encourage apprentices to reflect on errors and subsequently make amendments. Tutors and apprentices place considerable focus on redoing tests, error finding and dealing with misconceptions. The assessment process ensures that students make good progress. Most apprentices are aware of what their end-point assessments (EPA) will consist of and how they will be graded. However, a few level 2 and level 7 apprentices do not have a thorough understanding of the exact EPA requirements.

Tutors model respectful and professional behaviours and apprentices respond in like manner. During reviews, tutors discuss apprentices' development of appropriate behaviours. In particular, apprentices show good awareness of the need to behave ethically and with integrity at work. For example, apprentices understand the importance of maintaining client confidentiality and working in accordance with company procedures and values at all times.

Apprentices benefit from helpful careers information, advice and guidance discussions with their tutors and their employers. They are aspirational and a large proportion of apprentices who complete their level 3 programme move successfully on to the level 4 apprenticeship. Similarly, an increasing number of level 4 apprentices are moving on to the recently introduced level 7 apprenticeship. As a result, apprentices can progress in their career as an accounting professional and have the potential to achieve Chartered Accountant status.

Although many apprentices benefit from opportunities to learn about relevant topics beyond their vocational specialism, including citizenship, equality, and diversity, at 'drop-in' sessions, too many do not see these sessions as essential. As a result, not all apprentices have a sound enough grasp of this wider knowledge.

Leaders have implemented a range of measures to monitor and improve the quality of their provision. However, many quality assurance practices are descriptive rather

than evaluative. They are not linked coherently to other strategies. As a result, leaders do not have a good enough knowledge of their improvement priorities and which improvement actions work and which do not. Leaders recognise the need for external scrutiny and have very recently introduced a governance board. However, this is in its infancy and has not had an impact to date.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Apprentices feel safe and benefit from the very frequent support and help from their tutors. The designated lead and deputy lead are trained appropriately and update their knowledge about local risks, ensuring they share this information with tutors. Tutors are confident about discussing with their apprentices recent local cases involving radicalisation. This includes the recent tragic Plymouth shootings, which has deepened their awareness of the dangers of radicalisation. Tutors identify more vulnerable apprentices and support them well. However, senior management scrutiny of this activity is currently not systematic enough.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders should ensure that their quality assurance activities are more evaluative, and the improvement priorities identified focus on and have a positive impact on apprentices and their learning.
- Leaders, managers and tutors should continue to develop and implement an appropriate curriculum so that all apprentices benefit from a well-planned personal development programme that includes topics such as citizenship, equality and diversity.
- Leaders should ensure that the very recently introduced governance arrangements develop at pace so that they provide sufficient support and challenge to guide leaders' actions.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1276444
Address	Southernhay Lodge Banfield Crescent Exeter EX1 1QT
Contact number	01392 435 349
Website	www.apprenticeships.accountancylearning.co.uk
Principal/CEO	Simon Deane
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected
Main subcontractors	Not applicable

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of training, 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 apprentices' work, seeking the views of apprentices, staff and other stakeholders, and examining the provider's documentation and records.

Inspection team

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