

Inspection of Abacus Training Group

Inspection dates: 2–4 February 2022

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

Information about this provider

Abacus Training Group (Abacus) is a privately owned training provider established in 2008. Abacus started offering courses to adults using advanced adult learner loans in 2017. Leaders currently offer courses in beauty therapy, massage, nail technology, and laser and intense pulsed light treatments from a purpose-built facility in west London. At the time of the inspection, there were 23 learners studying the level 3 diploma in beauty therapy and six learners studying the level 3 diploma in nail technology. Just over half of the learners are between 20 and 30 years old. Just over a quarter of learners are under 30 years old, and just under a fifth are aged over 40. All learners are female.

Abacus also offers commercial training and consultancy support. Leaders do not work with any subcontractors.

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

Learners benefit from a culture of support and mutual respect at the training centre, where staff value them and care for them well. Many learners describe the other learners and staff as 'family'. Learners demonstrate a very positive attitude to their studies and are highly motivated to succeed. They attend their weekly lessons frequently and on time, and make good progress with their studies. They describe with pride their work and achievements, for example in designing nail art.

Learners develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to work in the beauty sector. Learners demonstrate industry-standard levels of dress and personal appearance. In practical lessons, they create a calm, relaxing and professional atmosphere for clients. Staff help learners build their client base and get models for assessments, for example by supporting them with social media branding. As a result, learners are able to quickly apply the new skills and knowledge they learn to their work with clients.

Through pairing up with different learners during practical lessons, learners gradually build their confidence and gain experience of providing a service to customers of different nationalities and ethnicities. As a result, learners are well prepared to work with a wide range of external clients.

Staff keep learners well informed about career opportunities in the beauty sector. For example, those who want to work in aesthetics know what further training in anatomy and physiology they will need to do in order to gain a deeper understanding of the face and body.

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

Following the previous inspection, leaders and managers reduced the number of subjects in which they offered advanced adult learner loans training. They took the decision to focus on courses in the beauty sector and to offer training from one single location. This allowed them to effectively resolve most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection.

Well-qualified and experienced staff use their knowledge and industry expertise well to plan and teach weekly lessons that gradually build learners' skills and knowledge. Staff teach the fundamental skills that learners are going to need to use more often during their course first. In nail technology, they teach manicure and pedicure first, and in beauty they start with facials. Staff gather detailed information about learners' previous knowledge and aspirations before they start their courses. They use this information well to make sure that lessons are relevant to them. For example, learners who join the nail technology course with no previous knowledge start learning about basic manicure techniques, such as filing and shaping nails, while those with some knowledge start with nail repairs.

Trainers use assessment effectively to check learners' understanding and give them meaningful feedback. For example, after doing their practical massage assessments, learners can talk confidently about what they did well and what areas they need to improve. Staff amend their future teaching based on the outcomes of assessment. For example, a trainer repeated previous demonstrations of massage techniques after identifying that several learners had struggled with a few of the techniques.

Learners improve their practical skills over time as a result of the precise and accurate feedback they receive on their assessments. For example, learners improve their skills when applying dark colours to nails when teachers have identified that they need to do this. Staff support learners effectively to develop their English and mathematics while on the course. They prepare learners to deal with business finance and make useful suggestions to help them improve, such as by speaking English at home and asking relatives to correct their mistakes.

Staff prepare learners well to move into employment or self-employment. Those who want to become self-employed receive guidance and support on insurance and lone working situations. Learners attend talks from employment agencies about their recruitment processes. Consequently, learners know what to expect when they attend an interview, such as checks on their practical skills and their health and safety awareness.

Staff encourage learners to expand the range of services they can offer, such as male treatments. For example, learners learn why electrolysis is a better way of removing hair in men than intense pulsed light. Some of the female learners who at first were apprehensive about carrying out treatments for men are now considering including them.

Leaders have focused their improvement actions on the areas highlighted at the previous inspection and not as a result of reflecting on their current practice. Leaders benefit from the support of external 'critical friends', who advise them about good practice in the provision of advanced learner loans training and the overall strategic direction for the business. However, they do not challenge leaders sufficiently to identify areas where the quality of training that learners receive can be improved and to identify actions that will bring about these improvements.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Learners feel safe in training. They know to whom to report concerns and are confident that staff will take appropriate action if required.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is appropriately trained and experienced. The DSL uses their knowledge from the commercial areas in which Abacus offers training, such as physical intervention, to enhance learners' safeguarding awareness. For example, learners learn how to identify potential signs of abuse on their clients,

such as bruising on the skin. Learners talk confidently about how they would deal with a disclosure from a client.

There are inconsistencies in the recording of the small number of incidents that staff have dealt with. As a result, leaders are not able to look for trends or analyse whether the support that they have provided has had a beneficial impact on learners.

What does the provider need to do to improve?

- Leaders and managers should make sure that they conduct a thorough self-assessment of the training they offer to identify the areas in which they could improve the quality of their training in line with their own priorities and expectations for the business.
- Leaders and managers should strengthen their arrangements with their 'critical friends' so that they provide them with effective challenge to bring about timely and relevant improvements for learners.
- Leaders and managers should identify, monitor and review the impact that the actions they take to safeguard their learners have.

Provider details

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Contact number	01273 514414
Website	www.abacustraininggroup.co.uk
Principal/CEO	John Fields (Managing Director)
Provider type	Independent learning provider
Date of previous inspection	30 April–2 May 2019
Main subcontractors	None

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and quality improvement plan, 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 training 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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