

# Inspection of Acacia Training Limited

Inspection dates: 20 to 23 September 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Information about this provider

Acacia Training Limited (Acacia) is an independent training provider, with its head office in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. It offers training for adult learners and apprentices in all regions of England from level 2 to level 5.

At the time of inspection, 990 apprentices were enrolled. Most apprentices follow standards-based apprenticeships in health, education and well-being. Acacia offers a small number of apprenticeships in beauty, business and dental nursing. There were also 699 learners studying adult learning programmes. These programmes are focused primarily on the development of employability skills, health and well-being. There are a small number of adult programmes in sport and beauty. The provider also offers traineeships; however, at the time of inspection there were no learners enrolled on these programmes.

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

Learners and apprentices rapidly develop new knowledge, skills and behaviours which allow them to be successful in their work and future careers. Through their studies, they improve their confidence and resilience over time. Learners and apprentices are positive about their futures because of the training they receive.

Learners speak highly of the support that tutor coaches provide. As a result, they are highly motivated to learn and to succeed.

Tutor coaches have high expectations of learners' and apprentices' conduct; this is reflected in how they conduct themselves in their learning and at work. Learners and apprentices show each other and staff high levels of respect and display acceptance of each other's views and beliefs. Tutor coaches nurture calm and inclusive environments in which learners and apprentices can study and learn in fair and inclusive settings.

The large majority of learners and apprentices achieve and make positive progress to their next steps. Many apprentices move on to higher levels of study with the provider and move into jobs with additional responsibility. For example, a small but significant number of apprentices progress from care assistant roles to managerial positions.

Learners and apprentices attend their training. Instances of absence are rare. Tutor coaches rearrange training sessions for apprentices that cannot attend to ensure that they do not fall behind in their learning.

Learners and apprentices feel safe at work and in their learning environments. They undertake a programme of personal development which helps them to develop wider employability skills, an understanding of fundamental British values, an appreciation of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism and an understanding of how to stay safe online.

Too few learners or apprentices receive high-quality advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions on their next steps. Consequently, they are not sufficiently aware of the further career opportunities that are available.

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

Leaders and managers have high aspirations about the curriculum they offer. They are ambitious for all learners and apprentices and place social justice at the forefront of key decisions that they make about their curriculums. Leaders work hard to ensure that most learners and apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that they need to progress to their next steps.

Leaders and managers have developed a curriculum which, in nearly all cases, responds to employers' required skills needs. They do this through the careful

selection of employability programmes, apprenticeships, traineeships and courses for adult learners. For example, employability courses focus specifically on developing the skills required for positive customer relations, a key requirement in the hospitality sector.

Leaders and managers work well with employers and community partners to jointly develop successful curriculums. Leaders meet frequently with employers and act on their feedback to develop curriculums for the future needs of the sector. For example, following discussions with employers, leaders at Acacia incorporate mental health first-aid training into both adult learning and apprenticeship care programmes.

Leaders and managers support their staff effectively. They consider staff workload and well-being thoroughly. They skilfully deploy initiatives to respond to work-related issues, such as stress management and financial hardship workshops. In addition, leaders encourage staff to support the local communities in which they work. For example, tutor coaches and leaders frequently undertake volunteer roles within their local communities.

Leaders develop staff performance effectively in nearly all cases. This ensures that staff can better support their learners. For example, leaders have implemented an effective middle-management training programme (the GROW scheme). This allows staff to develop their management and leadership skills prior to promotion to more senior roles within the organisation. However, leaders and managers do not always develop tutor coaches' subject expertise and teaching skills. As a result, a small minority of tutor coaches do not develop their craft of teaching to support learners and apprentices to achieve their potential.

In the large majority of cases, learners and apprentices follow a well-structured curriculum which provides them with the opportunity to develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Leaders have ordered teaching sensibly, building on foundation topics introduced early in the programme to develop both broader and deeper knowledge. Consequently, learners' and apprentices' understanding and mastery of the curriculum develops over time. For example, in early years settings, apprentices initially focus on the different stages of child development, followed by more advanced theoretical knowledge, such as trauma from physical and mental abuse and planning for interventions or multi-agency support mechanisms.

Tutor coaches have significant vocational experience. They use this experience to contextualise theoretical learning for both learners and apprentices with real-world examples. As a result, learners and apprentices can link their learning quickly with opportunities to apply theory in the workplace.

In most cases, the vocational starting points of learners and apprentices are well assessed and used successfully to plan learning. As a result, most are supported effectively to make progress. However, tutor coaches do not always use the

information from assessments in English and mathematics well enough to fill gaps in learners' and apprentices' knowledge.

Tutor coaches use a wide variety of assessment methods to measure learners' knowledge and to plan further learning. Most tutor coaches use questioning, repetition and assessment appropriately to ensure that learners and apprentices remember what they have been taught. In most cases, tutor coaches provide feedback that is clear, concise and sufficiently developmental. As a result, learners and apprentices understand how to improve their work and develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. However, in a very small number of cases, written feedback from tutor coaches is too narrowly focused on the achievement of unit criteria and does not identify what skills learners and apprentices need to develop to be successful in these units.

In a very small minority of apprenticeships, tutor coaches do not involve apprentices' employers sufficiently in the planning of their learning. In these cases, apprentices do not benefit from well-planned on- and off-the-job training, or opportunities to apply what they have learned in the workplace. This limits apprentices' acquisition of new knowledge, skills and behaviours.

Most learners and apprentices achieve well. Apprentices develop valuable skills which they apply effectively in the workplace. This often enables them to gain additional responsibilities and achieve promotions. Adults on employability-related courses are positive for their futures as a result of their studies. A significant majority of adult learners progress successfully to a higher level of study.

Leaders and managers have put in place suitable arrangements for the independent scrutiny of the quality of education they provide. The board of governors is made up of experienced practitioners who have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and provide healthy challenge to hold leaders to account.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a culture of safeguarding across the organisation and place a strong focus on the safeguarding of all their learners and apprentices. Leaders have nurtured a culture of continuous development of their safeguarding practices. Leaders frequently review policies and procedures and where needed, adaptations are made to further assure learner and apprentice safety.

Leaders have appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) as well as several qualified deputies. The DSL has developed strong relationships with relevant local, regional and national organisations, such as the police, regional 'Prevent' coordinators and safeguarding charities. Leaders receive useful updates and information from these organisations.

Leaders have put in place an appropriate policy to ensure the safe recruitment of staff and ensure that this policy is followed.

Leaders ensure that all staff are suitably trained in safeguarding. Staff undertake frequent training on suicide awareness, health and safety and the 'Prevent' agenda. As a result, staff use this training to ensure that learners and apprentices adopt safe working practices. However, leaders have not ensured that teaching staff help learners and apprentices to recognise local issues. Consequently, too few learners and apprentices understand the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism where they live and work.

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

- Leaders should ensure that tutor coaches use learners' and apprentices' baseline assessments in English and mathematics to target gaps in their knowledge effectively so that they make rapid and sustained progress through the curriculum.
- Leaders and managers should accelerate tutor coaches' professional development activities to ensure that they develop their subject expertise and teaching skills further to respond to the few areas of teaching and learning within the provider which do not meet the leaders' high aspirations.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices' on- and off-the-job learning activities are coordinated effectively and that all employers are involved in the planning of apprentices' learning.
- Tutor coaches and leaders should make sure that all learners and apprentices receive appropriate careers education, information, advice and guidance that enables them to consider the wider opportunities available.
- Tutor coaches should ensure that learners' and apprentices' understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism in their locality is continually developed throughout their programmes, so that they can apply this to their daily lives.

## Provider details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	50304
<b>Address</b>	Acacia House Trentham Business Quarter Bellringer Road ST4 8GB
<b>Contact number</b>	01782 646346
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://acaciatraining.co.uk">https://acaciatraining.co.uk</a>
<b>CEO</b>	Victoria Sylvester
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	19 to 22 January 2016

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of education, 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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