

Acacia Training and Development Ltd

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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Name of lead inspector:	Steve Battersby, Her Majesty's Inspector
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Monitoring visit: main findings

Context and focus of visit

Acacia Training and Development was inspected in September 2021. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.

Themes

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that all apprentices experience high quality off-the-job training, and that they apply and consolidate the new knowledge they have learned at work?

Reasonable progress

Leaders and managers have introduced new training for assessors which has helped them understand better the full requirements of an apprenticeship. Assessors now know which learning activities should be included in off-the-job training, such as job shadowing and writing assignments. Most assessors use this knowledge to advise their apprentices and employers on the types of learning that can be used to ensure that apprentices receive sufficient and good quality off-the-job training and learning activities.

Leaders and managers now liaise with employers more closely to ensure they understand fully an apprentice's training entitlement. Assessors work with employers to identify the gaps in knowledge and the skills apprentices need to learn. For example, following discussions with assessors and employers about their needs and requirements at work, apprentices studying the level 2 adult care apprenticeships now study the medicine administration unit earlier in the curriculum and qualify in medication management earlier in their apprenticeship. This has led to apprentices taking on more responsibility at work and higher numbers of staff who are able to issue medication to patients. However, a small number of apprentices are still not receiving their full entitlement of off-the-job training because of work commitments. Leaders and managers are working with these employers to ensure that apprentices receive and benefit from training.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that apprentices receive formal and impartial careers information, advice and guidance, so that they have a well-informed understanding of their career options, particularly apprentices working in the adult care sector?

Insufficient progress

Leaders have now included careers information, advice and guidance sessions in the revised curriculum plans. However, although two careers meetings are planned for apprentices, only one of these contains content which is relevant in meeting their needs. A small number of apprentices have had brief discussions with their assessors about their future careers. However, assessors only provide apprentices with advice about the next course but at a higher level.

Leaders recognise rightly that ensuring apprentices receive information about their next steps has not been sufficiently prioritised. Consequently, most apprentices have had no impartial information, advice and guidance. As a result, their knowledge of the range of careers options and the wider opportunities available to them after they have completed their apprenticeship is limited.

What progress have leaders made in their ability to carefully monitor the progress that apprentices make in developing new skills and knowledge, and to ensure that they complete their apprenticeships in the planned timescales? **Reasonable progress**

Leaders have introduced a new system to monitor how well apprentices are making progress in learning the content of their curriculum. Assessors now visit apprentices once a month to identify the work-related learning activities they have completed, and the new skills and behaviours they have developed as a result of studying the apprenticeship. They also provide apprentices with feedback on what they need to do to improve their knowledge and skills further. The majority of assessors take this opportunity to discuss apprentices' wider skills development needs, such as, the progress they are making in developing their functional English and mathematics skills or checking their understanding of how to keep themselves safe in the workplace. As a result, most apprentices know and understand how much progress they are making and what actions they need to take to improve their skills.

Leaders recognise rightly that not all assessors are consistently monitoring the progress that apprentices make in their learning. Managers have tackled this by conducting regular training sessions with assessors. This has helped them to understand how to recognise, record and take the appropriate actions to support apprentices better. However, a small number of assessors still do not understand fully how much progress their apprentices are making towards developing the skills, knowledge and behaviours they require to become valued employees.

What progress have leaders made in ensuring that staff plan, schedule and link the functional skills curriculum effectively to the apprenticeship programme, so that apprentices develop and practise their English and mathematics skills well over time? **Reasonable progress**

Managers now ensure that the functional skills tutor and assessors meet monthly to discuss each apprentice's progress and agree the strategies that assessors can use to help them to continually improve the standard of their work and identify their areas for improvement. As a result, and due to this much improved working relationship, assessors are now well supported by the functional skills tutor. This has helped them improve the support they provide to apprentices.

Assessors use their new knowledge gained from the functional skills tutor to work more effectively when training apprentices and ensuring they develop further the English knowledge and skills they need at work. For example, assessors teach apprentices to complete more detailed and accurate care records for their clients. Employers also support apprentices by checking that the care records are written clearly and are factual using the correct technical/medical terms. As a result, apprentices studying on the adult lead care worker apprenticeship complete the required documentation to a high standard. However, while apprentices are improving their English skills, such as, their use of grammar and comprehension, not all are developing their mathematics skills well enough and therefore do not yet have the level of skill they need for their roles at work.

Assessors work closely with employers to set apprentices effective and appropriate work-based tasks and targets, which enable them to practise and develop their English skills. Apprentices understand how their training relates directly to their practice at work. As a result, they improve their written English skills over time. However, managers do not ensure that all adult apprentices who have previously achieved GCSEs in English and mathematics, provide timely evidence of this achievement. Managers do not ensure that they commence their functional skills learning early enough and therefore, they do not achieve their full apprenticeship within the required timescale.

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