

# Inspection of Axia Solutions Limited

Inspection dates:

7 to 10 February 2023

## Overall effectiveness

## Requires improvement

The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Good**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Adult learning programmes

**Requires improvement**

Apprenticeships

**Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

## Information about this provider

Axia Solutions Limited is an independent learning provider based in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. At the time of the inspection, there were 95 learners on adult learning programmes, and 158 apprentices. Of the apprenticeships, 108 were taught directly by the provider. The large majority of these were at levels 2 to 5 in management, administration, and manufacturing. A subcontractor trained the remaining 50 apprentices. Of which, 37 were studying the level 3 print technician, and 13 on the level 2 print operative apprenticeships. Most learners on adult learning programmes were following one of two sector-based work academy programmes (SWAPs) in teaching assistant or construction, and a small number of learners were studying functional skills qualifications in English or mathematics.

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

Learners and apprentices enjoy their learning. They value the support they receive from their tutors and most discuss how their course or apprenticeship prepares them for their future career. However, adult learners on construction programmes focus too closely on learners' achievement of a qualification to allow them to gain employment in the construction industry. As a result, this course does not provide learners with sufficient learning beyond this qualification to develop their broader skills well enough.

Most learners and apprentices have a positive attitude to their learning. Attendance at taught sessions is high. Tutors have high expectations of the behaviour of learners, which translates into a positive and respectful culture during lessons.

Employers value the training that their apprentices receive and speak highly of the impact that they quickly have in the workplace. In the majority of cases, employers contribute actively to apprentices' reviews and have a clear understanding of the progress that apprentices make.

Most apprentices develop in confidence during their apprenticeship. For example, level 2 customer service practitioner apprentices develop skills, such as problem-solving and communication. As a result, they feel confident to make contributions in the workplace. However, the adult learning curriculums are not sufficiently ambitious for all learners. Some learners participate in remote-learning sessions which do not offer enough opportunities to develop their communication and teamworking skills. As a result, these learners are not as well prepared for work.

Learners and apprentices feel safe. They know how to report any concerns both in the workplace and to the provider.

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

Leaders and managers articulate a clear strategic vision for both apprenticeships and adult learning programmes that they offer. The curriculum they offer focuses on the needs of the region and is aligned with local skills priorities.

Leaders have developed links with external agencies, such as Jobcentre Plus, to offer SWAPs to those seeking employment in construction and as a teaching assistant. However, while these programmes have been designed to meet the needs of these partners, the curriculum that learners follow is not well planned or implemented. As a result, too few adult learners gain substantial new knowledge and skills as a part of their programme.

Shortly prior to inspection, governors had recruited a new leader. The new leadership team had identified concerns over the quality of adult programmes, and in particular the construction SWAP. They have put in place plans to conduct a

quality review of all adult courses. However, as this change in leadership is very recent, these plans have yet to be executed and consequently the impact cannot yet be seen.

Leaders closely manage the performance of their subcontractor. They have a detailed knowledge of the progress that apprentices who learn with the subcontractor make. The quality assurance processes that they apply, focus sharply on the quality of education that apprentices receive. They understand the strengths and weaknesses and work closely to provide support where this is needed. As a result, apprentices who study with the subcontractor achieve as well as those taught directly by the provider.

Leaders identified a significant number of apprentices who did not complete on time due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They took the decision to halt apprentice recruitment while tutors agreed action plans to support these apprentices to complete their apprenticeships. The number of apprentices beyond their planned end date is decreasing, and for those remaining, tutors have plans in place to support them to achieve.

Leaders have appropriate processes in place to manage and monitor the quality of the education that they provide to apprentices. Using these, leaders have identified areas for improvement and have led to several recent actions to improve apprentices' learning experience, such as improvements in target setting and the quality of feedback that apprentices receive. However, leaders have not placed a sharp enough focus on improving the quality of adult learning programmes and have failed to identify the weaknesses that exist. As a result, leaders have not taken effective steps to rectify these weaknesses.

Leaders and tutors have planned the apprenticeship curriculums so that apprentices develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours incrementally over time. For example, apprentices on the level 3 business administrator apprenticeship learn about time management, health and safety, and project management. They then progress to more advanced content where they apply this knowledge to projects in areas such as sustainability or reducing company expenditure. As a result, apprentices build their knowledge and skills over time and understand new more complex content as they progress.

In most cases, apprentices and adult learners undertaking programmes for teaching assistants benefit from tutors who have specialist knowledge and subject expertise. Where this is the case, tutors use this knowledge well to present new information to learners clearly. For example, on level 3 print technician apprenticeships, tutors use their industry knowledge of different printing equipment such as laser printers to support learners to develop new knowledge and skills. However, learners on construction programmes are not taught by tutors who have high levels of vocational expertise and consequently they do not benefit from this specialist vocational knowledge in their learning.

In most cases, leaders and tutors take steps to clearly identify apprentices' vocational starting points. Apprentices undertake detailed skills scans at the start of the apprenticeship which tutors use to provide apprentices with a challenging and ambitious curriculum. However, on adult learning programmes, tutors do not take sufficient steps to identify learners' starting points. As a result, leaders and tutors do not ensure that all adult learners benefit from a consistently challenging and ambitious curriculum, particularly where learners have existing knowledge and skills in these areas.

Tutors on apprenticeships use assessment well to check learning. They use a variety of teaching strategies such as frequent recaps, checks on retention and recall of prior learning to ensure that apprentices' learning is secure. As a result, apprentices know more and remember more over time. However, on adult learning programmes, particularly in construction, tutors do not use assessment well enough to check that learners' knowledge is secure before moving on. As a result, tutors cannot be sure that learners on construction programmes develop and secure new knowledge throughout their course.

In most cases, tutors provide apprentices with useful feedback on their work. Most apprentices know what to do to improve the quality of their work over time. However, on adult learning programmes, feedback is not developmental and does not always encourage learners to improve the quality of their work beyond the required knowledge, skills and behaviours needed to pass the qualification.

Tutors ensure that apprentices benefit from opportunities to apply theory to practice. They collaborate with employers to effectively plan and coordinate on- and off-the-job training. As a result, apprentices have the opportunity to apply their learning in the workplace and further develop their skills. A minority of adult learners undertaking teaching assistant programmes are supported by tutors to understand useful practical applications of their learning, such as using educational songs to promote learning when supporting children. However, on the majority of adult learning programmes, tutors do not routinely support learners to apply theory to practice. For example, in construction, when learning about manual handling in online sessions, learners are not supported to practise what they have learned. As a result, these learners do not develop their knowledge well enough.

Leaders and tutors support apprentices that require English and mathematics qualifications to develop their skills quickly. Apprentices benefit from effective individual and small-group teaching which focuses learning on the areas that apprentices most need to develop. However, tutors do not routinely support all apprentices as well to develop their skills further, where they already have the required English and mathematics levels needed for their apprenticeship.

Leaders have in place appropriate arrangements for governance. Governors are experienced educational professionals who demonstrate a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the apprenticeships the provider offers and share the strategic intentions of leaders. Governors meet regularly with leaders and hold them to account for the quality of education on apprenticeships. However, the absence of

leaders' scrutiny of their adult learning programmes has resulted in governors not being informed of the areas that they need to improve, and consequently they have been unable to hold leaders to account to make improvements in these areas.

Most learners and apprentices are supported effectively to develop a broad awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremist behaviour. Apprentices complete a module of training on these topics at the start of their programmes and adult learners can discuss the signs of radicalisation. However, in a few cases, apprentices are less well informed about the potential risks in the areas in which they live and work.

Tutors ensure that apprentices are aware of the career opportunities with their current employer. However, leaders do not ensure that all apprentices receive sufficient unbiased careers advice and guidance. Consequently, some apprentices are not aware of the wider career opportunities available to them. Adult learners do not benefit from high quality and useful information about their next steps. For example, learners are encouraged to sign up with job agencies to support them in securing work on completion of the construction programme. However, leaders have not ensured that all adult learners benefit from developing a broader understanding of their potential next steps.

In most cases, apprentices develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours over time. Apprentices on the level 2 lean manufacturing operative apprenticeship become competent welders. They learn how to read complex technical drawings and how to use portable tools such as a grinder. As a result, in a few cases apprentices gain promotion or take on additional responsibility because of their apprenticeship.

In a minority of cases, adult learners, particularly those on teaching assistant programmes, develop useful new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Learners develop their understanding of current safeguarding practices and legislation linked to the education of young people. However, adult learners on construction programmes do not always develop significant new knowledge, skills and behaviours, particularly those learners who have existing vocational experience within the sector area when they start the programme.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have appointed an appropriately qualified and experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL oversees safeguarding arrangements for the provider, and effectively monitor safeguarding arrangements within the subcontractor.

The DSL has appropriate policies and procedures in place to safeguard learners, including an appropriate policy for the safer recruitment of staff, and has put in

place suitable arrangements for the recording and reporting of safeguarding concerns, which are dealt with swiftly.

The DSL ensures that all staff are appropriately trained on topics related to safeguarding and shares regular updates from the links they have developed with regional safeguarding and prevent information sources to share with learners and apprentices.

Leaders have begun to introduce topics associated with healthy relationships. However, apprentices do not have their understanding of these topics systematically developed and as a result, too few can articulate what they have learned.

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

- Leaders should ensure that the curriculum that all adult learners follow is sufficiently well planned so that all learners develop substantial new knowledge, skills and behaviours which prepares them well for their next steps.
- Leaders should ensure that the starting points of all learners are used to plan learning to ensure that gaps in their knowledge are filled and all are challenged to meet their potential.
- Leaders should ensure that all apprentices receive support to develop their English and mathematics skills throughout their apprenticeship, including those who already have the required qualifications.
- Leaders should ensure that all learners and apprentices are supported to develop their understanding of healthy relationships.

## Provider details

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<b>Principal, CEO or equivalent</b>	Victoria Harte
<b>Provider type</b>	Independent Learning Provider
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6 December 2011
<b>Main subcontractors</b>	Learn 2 Print

## 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 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

Stuart Collett, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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