

Academy Education Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50305

Name of lead inspector: Andy Harris HMI

Last day of inspection: 15 January 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Academy Education (Academy) is based in a purpose-designed training academy near Oxford Street in central London. Academy Education is a relatively small, family-run business. With a commercial training history dating back to 1971, it has delivered work-based learning in hairdressing and barbering to London salons since 1996. There has been an increasing emphasis on publicly funded training which now constitutes around 65% of the Academy's turnover. All learners are on intermediate apprenticeship hairdressing and barbering courses funded by London Central Learning and Skills Council (LSC).
2. At the time of the inspection there were around 170 learners on courses, six of whom were on barbering courses. Learners are recruited in small groups, and a mix of groups, of around 30 learners, then come to the Academy every fifth week for a full week of training. All assessments are carried out in the Academy, although the Academy staff do also visit learners' salons, partly to ensure that they are receiving appropriate additional on-the-job training. Along with a managing director, the Academy has a director of education, eight trainers, one of whom is an internal verifier, as well as an additional internal verifier and two administrative staff.
3. There has been no significant change in provision since the previous inspection, although numbers of learners have grown steadily. The Academy does not have any arrangements to supply training on behalf of other organisations, or for other organisations to supply training for the Academy.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	117 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	
Hairdressing and beauty therapy	3

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of Academy provision is satisfactory. Managers and staff in this family-run business work well together and with their learners. Staff have good development programmes to improve their teaching and hairdressing skills. Learners enjoy their training, particularly group work during their week-long training sessions at the Academy. The lessons at the Academy are at a satisfactory or better standard.
- A satisfactory percentage of learners complete an apprenticeship, with most finishing before their expected end date. These results have improved over the years. Learners successfully complete their key skills as part of their main course. Although this is helpfully linked with hairdressing, there is insufficient detail for trainers and learners on exactly what is being covered and why.
- Assessment of learners' skills and knowledge is completed satisfactorily in the Academy. However there is no assessment in the workplace, and some learners miss out on the chance to show their skills in a different setting and progress a little faster. The Academy sometimes uses a learner's previous experience to plan a special course, but this is not always done in enough detail. Reviews of how well learners are doing are carried out in learners' salons, but do not happen as frequently as planned.

7. Learners are well supported by the Academy and their own salons. They know where to get assistance and Academy staff help them out with many problems. Promotion of safeguarding is satisfactory. Equality and diversity are well stressed at the beginning of the course but there is not enough routine discussion on how different clients' needs can be met in the salon.
8. The Academy uses its good links with employers and the hairdressing industry to make improvements. The formal self-assessment process is satisfactory, but the quality improvement plan is not used well.

Main findings

- The proportion of learners who complete their apprenticeship is satisfactory and most finish their qualification earlier than the expected end date. Learners genuinely enjoy their course, particularly their lessons at the Academy.
- The training really helps learners prepare for a hairdressing career. There is plenty of formal training, much of it relevant practical work on real clients. The staff at the Academy and at learners' salons are experienced and support the learners' development well. The week-long training sessions allow time for skills to be properly reinforced.
- Teaching and learning at the Academy are satisfactory overall. The better lessons are challenging and interest the learners. In some lessons it is not fully clear what the outcomes of the lesson should be and the planned activities on health and safety are not always covered.
- Learners satisfactorily complete the key skills element of their qualification while they are carrying out hairdressing tasks. However, neither the learners, nor some of the planning documents, are clear about what should be done and when.
- Assessment procedures at the Academy are satisfactory. Some learners miss out by not having assessments done in their own salon. Visits by Academy staff to learners' salons review progress and targets, but they are not always carried out when they should be.
- The Academy seeks to identify learners' previous experience so that a plan can be set up to allow some learners to progress faster than their less-experienced colleagues. However, this system is not rigorous enough to work well for all learners.
- Guidance and support for learners is good. A carefully planned and delivered induction period follows a thorough initial interview process. Reviews carried out every time a learner comes to the Academy give a chance for problems to be discussed and solved.
- Staff support and development are good. Written procedures and formal planning are not comprehensive, but they are reasonable for this long-established small business. More importantly, managers work closely with the training and administrative staff, supporting them informally and through training, and all work closely together to look after the learners.

- The promotion of safeguarding is satisfactory. Staff are properly checked. Basic staff training is carried out and staff are aware of their responsibilities. Learners feel safe and know whom to turn to in case of problems.
- Overall the promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Appropriate policies and concepts are well dealt with during the induction period. Some aspects of equality are covered in the routine hairdressing work but not in a comprehensive or carefully planned way. Learners with weak literacy and numeracy skills do better than those without difficulties.
- Good partnerships, with both employers and the wider hairdressing industry, lead to benefits for learners in terms of relevant training in employers' salons and updating of training at the Academy. Informal contacts with employers are good. Learners and employers do contribute to identifying possible improvements at the Academy, but not in a comprehensive or rigorous way.
- The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The system involves staff well, and to a lesser degree learners and employers. The quality improvement plan that comes out of this process does not have sufficient detail and is not properly reviewed and revised throughout the year.

What does Academy Education need to do to improve further?

- Introduce assessment in the workplace using either salon-based assessors or the Academy assessors to improve learner and employer involvement and increase the opportunities for early assessment.
- Improve procedures, record keeping, target setting and discussions with tutors to make better use of any learner's prior achievements to encourage early completions.
- Ensure all learners receive at least three reviews per year in their own salons, with discussions that include the learner and employer.
- Highlight when and how learners' key skills are due to be developed and recorded in lessons and show staff and learners how this is being done during the programme rather than brought together at the end of the course.
- Improve awareness of equality and diversity for employers and learners, particularly highlighting in lessons how the application of equality and diversity might require treatments to be adapted to support differing client needs.
- Ensure that actions in the quality improvement plan are understandable, realistic, have specific targets and that the progress is reviewed at specified intervals and actions amended if necessary.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- access to a variety of clients on whom they can practise
- being part of a group rather than individuals doing their apprenticeships alone
- time to develop practical skills without pressure from stylists

- the system of having a week's training at a time in the Academy
- one-to-one support and consistent guidance on professional standards
- the friendly atmosphere and encouraging trainers
- a commercial approach
- prompt updating of portfolios as they complete tasks in the salon.

What learners would like to see improved:

- a way of repeating some of the difficult subjects.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- training and qualifications that are relevant to salon employment
- a provider that is well organised with a professional and commercial approach
- the week's training programme, but also the flexibility that is allowed in that system
- the good mix of theory and practical training
- good communication with clear progress reports
- the fact that portfolios are kept at the Academy.

What employers would like to see improved:

- either in-salon assessors or visits by the Academy assessors to the salons
- occasional access to the learners' portfolios
- an opportunity to take higher level qualifications with the Academy.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Academy produced a significant improvement in success rates in 2007/08 to above national averages, but with a levelling off in the next year to around national averages. Managers are impressive in their enthusiasm to try and improve the provision. Training staff, particularly building on their recent teacher training, also seek to make improvements and support their learners in whatever way they can. Planning systems and routine procedures, including quality assurance activities, are adequate but lack some detail that could help improvements. Resources are used very efficiently to support learners, although there is limited capacity at present for extra improvement work such as developing off-site assessment and carrying out salon visits. While there have been significant improvements in some aspects identified in the previous 2006 inspection, such as success rates, not all identified areas for improvement have been dealt with.
10. Self-assessment is used adequately to identify areas for improvement, with a good involvement of staff and satisfactory representation of learners' and employers' views. Data is used appropriately to gauge improvements.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. Success rates are satisfactory. From a low 45% in 2005/06, success rates improved significantly to 67% in 2007/08, although in 2008/09 they then dropped slightly to just below the national average. Timely success rates have changed in a similar way. Although this rate also fell in 2008/09, it remains just above national averages. There are no differences in the performance of various groups of learners, excepting that those who were assessed as having weak literacy and numeracy skills do better than those with apparently stronger skills.
12. Close liaison with employers and their in-salon training, the effective use of clients at the Academy for practical work, the expertise of staff and the significant amount of off-the-job training all help learners develop a good understanding and knowledge of the practicalities of hairdressing. Several learners have progressed to eventually become owners of their own salons. Learners' work in lessons is at the standard expected. Learners' dress in the Academy does not always meet the Academy's rules.
13. Learners thoroughly enjoy their learning and are making satisfactory progress towards completion of their qualification. A potentially-useful system of using prior attainment to help more-able learners to complete earlier than their target end date lacks detail and rigorous application.
14. Learners feel safe both in the Academy and in travelling to and from their training. They are confident in the support they receive and whom to turn to if

problems arise at work or in their personal life. Health and safety are included in lesson objectives, although this was not always followed up in lessons observed.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In satisfactory lessons standards set and achieved by learners are at the appropriate level, although in some lessons outcomes were not clearly linked with learner activity. In the better lessons learners were well involved, for instance in a theory session that engaged and interested the learners in the topic of colouring faults and their resolution. Learners participated well in discussions and good use was made of directed questioning to test the understanding of all learners.
16. Key skills are satisfactorily integrated into the curriculum; appropriate reference to key skills achievement is made in hairdressing assessments in learners' portfolios. However, there is insufficient formal planning to emphasise where these skills are to be developed and learners have little understanding of the importance of this element of their work.
17. Assessment procedures are satisfactory. The internal verification process ensures all assessors are monitored at least five times a year. Sampling of assessments is done appropriately. External verifier reports are positive with few actions needing to be addressed between visits. However, there is no option of assessing in the workplace. Learners who develop competence in a variety of basic hairdressing techniques in their own salons do not have these assessed.
18. Planned visits and reviews in the employers' salons are not carried out as regularly as planned. A few learners had received no visits despite being on the programme for many months. There is a good system for exchanging records of learners' activities, at the Academy and in their own salons, although the reports from salons were of variable quality.
19. Enrichment opportunities are appropriate and include visits to shows, exhibitions, and competitions to challenge students and enhance their employability prospects. The week-long training sessions meets employers' needs well, but there is also flexibility in timetables to allow learners to adjust their attendance to meet employers' requirements. Academy has decided to provide just apprenticeships in hairdressing or barbering and refer learners elsewhere for advanced courses. This makes it difficult to accredit advanced skills that some learners gain, including those learners who complete their course but continue to attend training to start developing these advanced skills.
20. Links with industry at a local and national level are good, and allow Academy Education to plan changes to courses well.

21. Care, guidance and support are good. Learners appreciate the friendly and supportive environment at the Academy, with good opportunities to develop practical skills and be part of a team. Individual tutorials are held with each learner during their week at the Academy. These can lead to learners with problems getting help, or access to external agencies when necessary. In all lessons learners received good one-to-one support to help individuals develop their practical or theoretical skills. The initial advice and guidance and induction processes are thorough, and this helps learners quickly settle into their training programme.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

22. The management and support given by management are good. Managers are very encouraging and approachable. Staff enjoy their job and work professionally and enthusiastically with their learners. Staff development, covering both hairdressing and teaching, is a growing strength. A recently revised system of observing lessons is helping staff improve. Policies, procedures and business planning documents are adequate but lack the detail to guide staff in improvement activities.
23. Revised policies and guidance on safeguarding, and increasing emphasis by Academy, help make the promotion of safeguarding satisfactory. Appropriate checks are carried out on staff and are properly recorded. Training of staff, and their understanding of safeguarding, are satisfactory. Training is being developed in light of advice from the local Safeguarding Children Board. Where there have been potential problems these have been properly dealt with. Potential weaknesses in absence reporting have been recently corrected. Employers are not fully clear on their roles and responsibilities.
24. Communication with employers and learners is good on an informal basis. There are reasonable attempts to gather more formal feedback to aid improvements, but these have limited impact.
25. Academy Education satisfactorily promotes equality and diversity, tackles discrimination and takes appropriate actions to narrow any achievement gap. Appropriate policies and procedures are made available to learners and employers and are well reinforced with learners during initial interviews and induction. Learners' understanding of how equality and diversity applies to learners and their work are checked during reviews using a bank of questions; although questions are relevant to hairdressing there are too few questions and some are too simplistic and do not generate debate. During the training weeks there is some consideration of how to treat clients of different cultures or with differing needs but this is not done in a sufficiently planned or extensive way. Staff, who in their background represent the mix of learners, have a good understanding of equality issues; this is reinforced by annual training delivered by external specialists. Close supervision of learners, and a well-understood policy on bullying, ensure that learners are free from harassment. Managers carry out little routine analysis of the performance of differing groups of

learners. Sixteen per cent of the learners are males, which is higher than the usual proportion on hairdressing courses.

26. The satisfactory self-assessment process leads to a quality improvement plan. The detail and then review and implementation of this plan are insufficient. Some targets lack proper detail or definition, and there is no clear system for the checking success of actions and re-adjustment of the plan if required.
27. Academy Education provides good value for money. Effective course programming and good liaison with employers ensure that learners have significant off-the-job training time. Accommodation and staff resources are well utilised. Small groups, and the regular use of real clients in practical sessions, aid good quality training. Financial controls are good.

Information about the inspection

28. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by Academy Education's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of Academy Education's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local LSC, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
29. Inspectors used group and individual interviews and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning and assessment sessions.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Academy Education Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners					
Full-time learners					
Part-time learners	170				170
Overall effectiveness	3				3
Capacity to improve	3				
Outcomes for learners	3				3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?					
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3				
How well do learners progress?					
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2				
How safe do learners feel?	3				
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*					
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*					
Quality of provision	3				3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3				
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3				
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2				
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2				
Leadership and management	3				3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3				
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*					
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3				
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3				
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3				
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3				
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2				

*where applicable to the type of provision

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