

West Anglia Training Association

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 55306

Name of lead inspector: William Baidoe-Ansah HMI

Last day of inspection: 9 July 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: West Anglia Training Association Ltd
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Information about the provider

1. West Anglia Training Association (WATA) is a non-profit making company and a registered charity. The company is based on the outskirts of Huntingdon and employs 24 staff overall of which five are dedicated to the youth training section, which manages apprentice training. An additional full time staff member and four contractors act as assessors and internal verifiers for youth training. As a group training association, the company has around 55 member companies. The majority of the company's income comes from providing a variety of commercial training courses to member companies, particularly in health and safety, technical and engineering skills and management/supervisory training. Youth training accounts for around 20 per cent of its turnover.
2. The company has a contract with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to provide apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships in engineering, administration and warehousing and distribution. There are 101 learners, of whom 73 are advanced apprentices and 28 are apprentices. Of these apprentices, 17 individuals are on the Programme Led Pathways scheme. Fifteen females and 86 males are currently funded. Thirty-eight member companies located throughout Eastern England employ learners. Off-the-job training is subcontracted to 12 further education colleges and three private training groups.
3. WATA provides training for companies across the whole of the east of England. It is generally a prosperous area with low levels of unemployment although there are pockets of higher unemployment in some rural areas of the region.
4. The following organisations provide training on behalf of WATA:
 - Anglia Ruskin University
 - Apex Training Services
 - Barnfield Technology College
 - Bedford College
 - Bedford Training Group
 - Cambridge Regional College
 - College of West Anglia
 - Havering College
 - Huntingdon Regional College
 - Milton Keynes College
 - Oaklands College
 - Peterborough Regional College
 - Vogal Industrial Training
 - Wakefield College

■ West Suffolk College

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	190 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	2
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3

Overall effectiveness

- WATA's provision is satisfactory overall. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory, with some low success rates in 2008/09, which are showing signs of improvement in the current year. Learners gain a range of good additional qualifications and health and safety is rigorously reinforced. Learners feel safe. Reviews and assessments are good and learners' portfolios demonstrate high standards of workmanship. The needs and interests of learners and employers are met well. Support for learners is satisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Safeguarding is satisfactory and meets current requirements. Equality and diversity are also satisfactory, which reflects learners' understanding. Self-assessment is broadly accurate and subcontractors are effectively managed. WATA demonstrates a satisfactory capacity to improve.

Main findings

- Many apprentices study at a higher level than that required by the apprenticeship framework, typically to Higher National and Foundation Degrees in Engineering. A significant proportion also study and achieve key skills at level three. Additional qualifications increase the future prospects of learners and are valued by employers.

- Success rates are low overall. Advanced apprenticeship success rates have been at or above the national average until 2008/09, when they dropped to below this measure; much affected by redundancy and the effects of the recession on the industry.
- The apprenticeship programme is largely programme led and has been subcontracted to various providers. Poor success rates over the last three years have led WATA to cancel poor performing contracts. The remaining provider is doing well with in-year completions above the national average.
- The promotion of health and safety is good. Good attention is paid to reinforcement of health and safety during review sessions. Reviewers are appropriately qualified in health and safety. Learners feel safe within this environment.
- Review and assessment are good. Three staff members carry out regular structured reviews, each concentrating on the different aspects of vocational progress, key skills progress and pastoral issues. The arrangements reinforce learning well and allow learners to integrate their knowledge effectively. However, some learners nearing the end of their programme have not had their work confirmed.
- Employers recognise that WATA ensures that programmes meet their needs as well as those of apprentices and are very satisfied with the service they receive. Companies are fully involved in the work-based elements of apprenticeship programmes, and are active in planning learners' work to enable them to progress through their apprenticeship framework.
- Initial assessment, advice and guidance are thorough. Diagnostic tests for engineering aptitude and basic skills requirements are used effectively. The standard of entrants into the apprenticeship programme has improved greatly since WATA has undertaken this role in the recruitment processes. The learning environment is supportive.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Apprenticeship training is well aligned to the companies overall strategic priorities. Learners benefit from the company's commercial training activities. Communication is good.
- Safeguarding is satisfactory. WATA has a new policy and a trained designated officer. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are carried out in line with regulations but staff have yet to receive formal training.
- Equality and diversity are satisfactory. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. It forms an appropriate part of induction and is suitably reinforced in reviews. There are no differences in the performance of different groups of learners.
- WATA's self-assessment includes staff well and is appropriately moderated and reported to the board. The report is broadly accurate but overly descriptive. User views are collected through surveys but are not sufficiently analysed to inform quality improvement.

What does WATA need to do to improve further?

- Continue to work with members of the association so that learners affected by redundancy complete as much of their qualification as possible.
- Develop the assessment process to be more summative so that learners' interest is maintained and their good progress assured.
- Develop the review process to further promote learner understanding of equality and diversity and safeguarding.
- Continue to develop safeguarding practices by ensuring all staff are trained and risk assessments are recorded so that learners are fully protected.
- Develop a formal strategy to involve learners and employers in self-assessment and other quality initiatives and analyse user views to support and promote improvement.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the opportunity to build confidence as a skilled worker
- getting a good qualification and gaining a career for life
- getting on with learning yourself and not being watched all the time
- learning a range of skills before specialising
- the friendly and personable staff who will go the extra mile for you and respond quickly to mark work you have submitted
- the training which makes you think deeply about the work you are doing
- the college course which is very helpful in supporting learning
- the flexibility of the programme which ensures that shifts do not interfere with learning
- that you can earn while you learn
- being able to get plenty of additional qualifications.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the travel allowance which does not cover the costs
- the time between (NVQ) assessors visit is too long
- the lack of continuity when staff changes are made.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the support, encouragement and challenge WATA give to apprentices
- the full service of training and apprenticeships they provide and the way they involve and consult with employers

- the interested and committed staff who always provide a professional and effective service
- the fact that they make it appear as if you are their only client
- the fact that they involve employers in all feedback to do with our learners and that they do not accept work that is not up to their own high standard.

What employers would like to see improved:

- none mentioned.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

6. The key weaknesses identified at the last inspection have been partially addressed. The progress of apprentices and advanced apprentices is now satisfactory having improved since the last inspection. Most learners who complete achieve within the planned timescale. However, WATA has yet to address fully the use of feedback to inform improvements. Success rates for advanced apprentices were high until 2008/09. WATA has taken decisive action to address poor performance on some of its subcontracted apprenticeship programmes, leading to improvement in recent cohorts. The management of subcontracted provision is effective with a robust observation of teaching and learning at its core. Self-assessment includes staff well and is broadly accurate.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

7. Many learners gain good additional qualifications. Many apprentices study at a higher level than that required by the apprenticeship framework, typically for a Higher National Engineering qualification. A few apprentices are supported on foundation degree courses. Most learners undertake key skills at level three although only level two is required in the framework.
8. Employers provide good additional training beyond that required for the apprenticeship framework. Apprentices value these opportunities and recognise that they may be of use if they are not employed when they complete their apprenticeship.
9. Learners progress at an appropriate pace on apprenticeship programmes. Portfolios are of a high standard and contain detailed and diverse evidence that is clearly cross-referenced. Learners speak confidently and in detail about their learning and programme. The standard of learners' work is generally good.
10. Success rates in 2008/09 were low. Success rates for advanced apprenticeship programmes were at or above the national average in 2006/7 and 2007/8 but fell in 2008/09, much affected by redundancies amongst member companies. The apprenticeship programme, the vast majority of which is Programme Led provision, has been subcontracted to a variety of providers and has consistently under-performed over the last three years. WATA has ceased to work with all but one provider who has improved provision with in-year completions above the national average.
11. Some apprentices have improved their well-being by gaining their apprenticeship and progressing from their earlier low skilled employment to more skilled work.

12. Health and safety are well reinforced and safe working practices are evident. All machinery in employers' premises is well maintained, used to a safe standard and displays appropriate signage and certification. Relevant risk assessments are in evidence and current. Learners feel safe within this environment. Good attention is paid to reinforcement of health and safety during review sessions.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

13. Review and assessment are good. Three provider staff carry out regular and well-structured reviews. Each staff member concentrates on the different aspects of vocational progress, key skills progress and pastoral issues. This very effectively enables learners to integrate their understanding of the programme as a whole.
14. Learners demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the programme in their confident use of the rich evidence contained within their portfolios.
15. Internal verification is rigorous and well planned. Sampling is well planned and diverse. Internal verifiers observe and grade assessors regularly and give them structured and formal feedback. They include learners in the feedback where appropriate. Standardisation meetings are regular and scheduled. However, several apprentices are nearing the end of their training and their employer has not confirmed the evidence in their portfolio as their own work. In some cases, the assessor has not signed the work as satisfactory.
16. WATA meets the needs and interests of learners and employers very well. They recruit learners from diverse age, educational and employment backgrounds and ensure that prior attainment and experience are reflected in individual learning programmes. The learning environment is very supportive with learners encouraged to undertake qualifications of a higher level than that required by the apprenticeship framework. Companies are fully involved in the work-based elements of apprenticeship programmes, and are active in planning the learners' work to enable them to progress through their apprenticeship framework. Employers are extremely satisfied with the communication and service WATA offers through the apprenticeship programme. The range of courses studied at college subcontractors meets the needs of the learners and employers as well as the apprenticeship framework. Many of the assignments are related to the apprentices' work place.
17. Initial assessment, advice and guidance are thorough. Diagnostic tests for engineering aptitude and basic skills requirements are carried out at the beginning of the programme. Most learners speak confidently on issues promoted during induction. However, a few learners have poor recall of induction programme details. Important aspects of the induction programme are effectively revised in the employment rights and responsibilities unit of the apprenticeship programme. These are further reinforced during reviews.

18. The Programme Led apprentices are successfully supported to find employment both during and often after the programme has been completed.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

19. Leadership and management are satisfactory. WATA as a whole has a clear strategy to provide training for its member companies. The apprenticeship training is given equal priority alongside other business imperatives. Its successful commercial training activities provide opportunities for apprentices to supplement their training with additional qualifications. WATA has a well-established appraisal process, which sets appropriate performance targets for staff and identifies training needs well. Effective communication between members of the training team ensures that learners' needs are met well. A board of trustees made up of managers in association companies receive appropriate reports from the training manager.
20. WATA's arrangements for safeguarding are satisfactory. WATA is in the early stages of responding to the increased demands for safeguarding. It has a new policy, which has been read by all staff and a designated officer who has undertaken appropriate training. Training for other staff has been booked, but not yet carried out. Staff who have regular contact with learners are CRB checked. WATA carries out appropriate risk assessments for other staff, which are not always recorded. Safeguarding is included in induction and learners are appropriately informed about what action to take if they have any concerns. The very few issues that have arisen have been dealt with appropriately. WATA is taking reasonable steps to assure itself that subcontractors have carried out appropriate checks.
21. Equality and diversity are satisfactory. The proportion of minority ethnic learners reflects their low proportion in the region. Female learners are also underrepresented. WATA has reviewed its recruitment practices and marketing material to attract more women and minority ethnic learners into engineering. WATA monitors the performance of different groups and there are no significant performance gaps. Equality and diversity are a standing item on the management team agenda. WATA has a satisfactory equal opportunities policy and ensures that all employers have appropriate policies in place. They support employers in developing a policy where needed. Staff training in equality and diversity is satisfactory. All staff have recently undertaken training in disability awareness and in recruiting under-represented groups. Equality and diversity are adequately reinforced in reviews and learners' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory.
22. WATA's engagement of learners and employers is satisfactory. WATA uses the learner surveys carried out as part of the framework for excellence and carries out its own annual survey of employers. However, they are not sufficiently analysed to inform actions for improvement. WATA has not yet developed a formal user engagement strategy and is in the early stages of developing an electronic learner forum.

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23. WATA has a well-established self-assessment process. The training manager draws the report together with suitable involvement from staff. The report includes an appropriate analysis of data and is reasonably accurate. However, much of the text is descriptive and does not sufficiently support the judgements made. The report is moderated by the management team and reported to the board of trustees. Learner and employer views from surveys inform the report. However, learners, employers and subcontractors are not formally involved in the process. WATA monitors its subcontractors effectively. The company carries out observations of teaching and learning with its main college subcontractors, which leads to improvements for learners. Learners in colleges have regular opportunities to provide feedback and their attendance is closely monitored.
24. Resources are at least satisfactory. WATA training premises are well equipped with industry standard equipment. Employer premises vary from excellent to satisfactory. Value for money is satisfactory.

Information about the inspection

25. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's training manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local SFA, 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.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the college. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

West Anglia Training Association

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	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	101	101
Part-time learners	0	0
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	n/a	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	n/a	
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
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?	3	
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?*	n/a	
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?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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