

Acacia Training Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50304

Name of lead inspector: Gerard McGrath HMI

Last day of inspection: 14 May 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider
Acacia Training Limited
Acacia House
Trentham Business Quarter

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Information about the provider

1. Acacia Training Limited (ATL) is a private provider established in 2000 to provide training for care settings. The main office is in Trentham, Staffordshire.
2. Substantial changes have been made to the size and management of the provision since the time of the previous inspection. ATL has withdrawn from its previous apprenticeship consortium. It now offers National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes and training for literacy and numeracy qualifications through a contract. The provider does not subcontract any part of its provision.
3. All learners are employed and work in care, early years and playwork settings across England. Learners can join the programme at any time. Training is in the workplace. Assessors visit learners at least once a month. The small numbers of learners on literacy and numeracy programmes are also working towards an NVQ.
4. At the time of the inspection, 388 care learners are working towards NVQ qualifications at level 2, 301 towards NVQ at level 3 and 13 at level 4. Twenty seven early years learners are working towards NVQ at level 2, 42 learners towards level 3 and 11 towards level 4.
5. Small numbers of learners are on programmes in business administration and customer service, support services and team leading. A few learners are on literacy and numeracy programmes. ATL has recently started to recruit learners on to a Young Apprenticeship programme for those aged 16 to 18. These areas were not included in this inspection.
6. The provider was previously inspected in 2006 when the outcomes for learners, quality of the provision, leadership and management including equality of opportunity were all satisfactory.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	863 learners

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	2
Equality and diversity	3
Subject areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	3

Overall effectiveness

7. Overall effectiveness is satisfactory. ATL's leadership and management and arrangements for equality and diversity are satisfactory. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The provision in health, public services and care is satisfactory.
8. The number of learners who achieve their main qualification is satisfactory and for a minority, good. Learners develop good, occupational skills. However, not enough learners complete their qualifications within the planned time. Assessors are effective in motivating and supporting learners, a few of whom are returning to learning after many years. The range of programmes is good and very effectively meets the needs of employers, and in supporting learners gain promotion at work. Most learners now make satisfactory progress, but a minority are being insufficiently challenged and could achieve their qualifications earlier. Target setting and monitoring of the progress of learners and their skills development is inadequate. Use and promotion of information and communication technology is insufficient.
9. ATL has managed the significant organisational change since the previous inspection well. However, managers are still to fully implement a high proportion of new systems and processes. Acacia has good arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children and promotes these well to learners and employers. Learners feel very safe and have a good understanding of safe working practices. Strategic planning is insufficiently comprehensive and does not clearly articulate how the

organisation will progress from its current position to its stated goals. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners have an appropriate understanding of equality and diversity as it applies to their job roles. There are no significant variations in achievement between groups of learners. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection, action has been successful in improving aspects of the quality of provision and most identified areas for improvement at the previous inspection are now satisfactory. However, the implementation of a full range of formal quality arrangements is incomplete.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. The number of learners who achieve their main qualification is satisfactory and for a minority good. Learners develop relevant occupational skills. However, not enough learners complete their qualifications within the planned time.
- Assessors provide very effective one to one support for learners. Initial assessment and regular assessment accurately identify individual learners' needs. Assessors have an appropriate range of skills and knowledge enabling them to support effectively both the pastoral and academic needs of learners. ATL provides additional support as and when required.
- Medium and long term target setting for learning is insufficient. Short-term targets are clearly set and monitored in assessment plans. However, the review process is not effective in informing the learners of their progress or setting targets to ensure they complete units of their NVQ.
- Monitoring of learners' progress is weak. No effective system is in place to ensure learners, employers and managers accurately monitor individual progress. Assessors are unable to plan systematically the completion of NVQ units, and managers do not have sufficient data to enable them to plan staff's work effectively. The recording of the reasons for learners' slow progress and plans to meet learner's support needs is poor.
- Use and promotion of ICT is insufficient to support learning. Staff do not encourage sufficiently the use of ICT for individual research and presenting work. References to learner's own work experiences are insufficient in portfolio to demonstrate their learning and skills development.
- A good range of provision meets the needs of employers and learners. ATL offers qualifications in health and social care and the care of young people and children from level 2 to level 4 as well as level 4 qualifications in leadership and management necessary for employers to meet the National Minimum Care standards. The range of qualifications available supports learners in gaining work promotions.
- Management of change is good. Directors have effectively re-structured the organisation, and refocused job roles to ensure clear lines of accountability. ATL has introduced a substantial number of new processes, which have been communicated well to staff.
- ATL has very good arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children and promotes these well to staff, learners and employers. The safety of learners is

given a high priority by managers. Learners feel very safe and have a good understanding of safe working practices. Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place for all staff working with learners and the monitoring of records is good.

- ATL has effective arrangements to monitor equality and diversity. Learners' understanding of this area is satisfactory for their job roles and responsibilities. Managers monitor relevant data effectively. Over the last three years, the achievement gap between women and men has narrowed.
- Strategic planning is insufficiently comprehensive. The linking of strategic objectives to the strategic plan is not effective. Financial reporting and accountability is good but this does not adequately inform planning for future growth and development. The strategic plan does not clearly show how the organisation will progress from its current position to its stated goals.
- ATL has successfully improved the quality of provision and most of the previously identified areas for improvement are now satisfactory. However, the implementation of a full range of formal quality improvement arrangements has been slow. Observations of teaching and learning do not focus sufficiently on learners' learning.

What does Acacia Training Limited need to do to improve further?

- To continue to improve outcomes, including eliminating the inconsistencies between success rates in different regions, through effective management of learner's progress.
- To improve the use of challenging targets by to drive learners' progress and improving the recording of their learning and development during progress reviews.
- Improve the analysis and use of management information in better monitoring performance and planning consistent improvements to the provision.
- Agree and implement comprehensive strategic plans to include the further development of the learning programmes.
- Further develop and consistently implement the range of systematic quality improvement arrangements.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- good motivation and support from assessors
- the way assessors break down the learning tasks which are to be completed
- getting a useful qualification
- learning how to fulfil their job roles better.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the confusing way a minority of questions are set
- more text books, handouts and learning resources.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- flexibility in the approach of assessors
- the way assessors empathise with learners
- the confidence that learners develop in the workplace.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the time it takes for learners to complete their qualification
- interruptions to the programmes due to staff changes
- communication about changes to the programmes.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement Grade 3

10. ATL demonstrates satisfactory capacity to make and sustain improvements. Since the previous inspection, ATL has made significant improvements to aspects of the quality of provision. Outcomes for learners have improved in line with national averages. ATL has also improved assessment practices including initial assessment process, induction process, and support for learners. Safeguarding arrangements are good, and equality and diversity and is satisfactory.
11. Directors have a clear vision for the development of the company, which they share with staff effectively. Management of the significant changes to the structure of the organisation have been successful. ALT has sufficient staff and resources to meet learners and employers' needs. Financial management is good.
12. Staff and managers demonstrate good commitment for continuous improvement. Managers use meetings well to plan for improvements. The self-assessment process is inclusive, particularly in relation to staff. Learners and employers' feedback also contributes effectively. The self-assessment report is however, descriptive and not sufficiently evaluative. The development plan focuses clearly on improving the identified weaknesses. ATL has a well-established system to observe teaching and learning. However, the recording and reviewing of actions to improve the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficient.

Outcomes for learners Grade 3

13. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. Overall success rates for level 2 programmes have risen from 72% in 2007/08 to 85% in the current year. Success rates on level 3 programmes have risen from 66% to nearly 80% over the same period. However, the improvements in completing within the agreed timescale have been slower and these remain around the national averages. Success rates for the small number of learners taking literacy and numeracy qualifications are below national averages. Learners develop good relevant occupational skills and the majority gain promotions at work. Most current learners make satisfactory progress towards their qualifications.

The quality of provision Grade 3

14. Teaching and learning is satisfactory. One to one support for learners by assessors is very effective. Initial assessment and regular NVO assessment accurately identify individual learners' needs. Assessors have an appropriate range of skills and knowledge enabling them to effectively support both the pastoral and training needs of learners. Informal additional support for literacy and numeracy skills is provided as and when required. Assessors are effective

in motivating and supporting learners, a minority of whom are returning to learning after a substantial period away from education.

15. Medium and long-term target setting for learning are insufficient. Short-term targets are set and monitored in assessment plans. However, the review process is not effective in informing the learners of their progress or setting targets to ensure they complete units of their NVQ. Most learners are unaware of their planned end date and additional assessor visits are often needed during the latter stages to accelerate their progress.
16. Monitoring of learner's progress and development is weak. No effective system is in place to ensure learners, employers and managers accurately monitor individual progress. Assessors are unable to plan systematically the completion of NVQ units, and programme supervisors have insufficient information to enable them to use staff resources more effectively. The recording of the reasons for slow progress and plans to meet learner's support needs is poor.
17. The encouragement of the use of computers for individual research, communicating information to assessors and presenting work is not sufficient. Staff and learners place too much reliance on the use of standardized workbooks and case studies to provide evidence of competence for the NVQ. Examples of learners expressing their own individuality are too few. Learners rarely relate theory to their own work experiences to demonstrate their learning and skills development.
18. ATL offer a good range of provision to meet the needs of employers and learners. Acacia training offer qualifications in health and social care and the care of young people and children from level 2 to level 4 as well as level 4 qualifications in leadership and management necessary for employers to meet their responsibilities under the National Minimum Care standards. The care qualifications meet the needs of employers who work in a wide variety of care settings including childcare, elderly residential care and learning difficulties. The range of qualifications available supports learners in gaining work promotions and role changes from team leaders through to senior managers.
19. The involvement of employers in learning is satisfactory. Employers provide learners with good supervision, skills training and a range of additional training opportunities which relate well to the theory knowledge requirements of the NVQs. However, they are often insufficiently involved in the formal planning, review and assessment of the qualification. Informal relationships between employers and Acacia assessors are good. The better employers ensure learners have additional opportunities to gain a wider experience outside of their normal job role.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

20. ATL's management of change is good. ATL has undergone significant organisational change since the previous inspection. The operations director uses her excellent understanding of the healthcare industry particularly well to ensure learners have effective progression routes. ATL makes good use of labour market information to target provision and regional needs. Directors have effectively re-structured the organisation, and refocused job roles to meet business needs. Team meetings are regular and ATL has clear lines of accountability. The provider has introduced a substantial number of new processes but managers are still to fully implement them.
21. ATL has very good arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable adults and children and promotes these well to staff, learners and employers. Learners feel safe and have a good understanding of safe working practices. The reviewing of policies and procedures takes place regularly. All staff have completed training for safeguarding provided by Staffordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. A designated officer is in place with appropriate levels of training. Criminal Record Bureau checks are in place for all staff working with learners and the monitoring of records is good. ATL carries out thorough risk assessment checks on employers' policies and practices. Most staff have completed a health and safety qualification. The organisation is making good progress to meeting the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) vetting and barring requirements.
22. ATL's vision and aspirations for the company are clear but strategic planning is insufficiently comprehensive. The linking of strategic objectives to the strategic plan are not effective. Financial reporting and accountability is good but this does not adequately inform planning for future growth and development. Consideration is insufficient to forecasting costs associated with the anticipated growth in contracts and learners. The strategic plan does not clearly show how the organisation will progress from its current position to its stated goals. The new data system provides a range of useful reports and previous problems in this area are resolved. However, the strategic plan does not use this data sufficiently well to set challenging targets for learner's success. ATL has no clear strategy to support literacy and numeracy provision and management of this area is weak.
23. ATL satisfactorily manages the use of its resources. Financial management is thorough and allocated effectively to support the development of the new contract responsibilities. The company has a new sustainability policy, which is working well. However, not enough learners are completing their qualifications within the planned time. Learner's use and availability of information communication and adaptive technology across regions is variable.
24. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. ATL has effective arrangements to monitor equality and diversity. Policies are clear for both learners and staff that cover relevant legislation. Learners' understanding is satisfactory for their job roles and responsibilities. Managers monitor relevant data effectively. Over the last three years, the success rate gap between women and men has narrowed, and success rates by men are now level with those of women. Recruitment of men

learners has also improved. Variations in achievement between minority ethnic groups are not significant. ATL has not effectively identified and taken action to resolve some regional variation in completing within the agreed timescale. All staff have recently undertaken update equality and diversity training. However, some trainers do not always sufficiently introduce relevant equality and diversity topics into teaching and learning. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of the current complaints procedure and staff deal with any complaints effectively.

25. Engagement with users is satisfactory. ALT has recently implemented policies for learner and employer engagement. These are starting to have an impact, particularly in the literacy and numeracy programme where employers' involvement in the programme is good. ATL respond well to any concerns from users and collect and evaluate feedback from learners and employers on a regular basis. However, the information collected via feedback overall is insufficiently qualitative to help inform improvements.
26. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Management and staff meetings are effective forums to identify and implement improvements. Since the last inspection, ATL has successfully improved aspects of the quality of provision. Most identified areas for improvement are now satisfactory. However, the implementation of a full range of formal quality improvement arrangements has been slow. Observations of teaching and learning are effective, but the process does not focus sufficiently on the learners' experience. The observation process does not include all key aspects of the provision. Records of actions in management, staff and audit committee meetings are insufficient. The development plan outlines actions for weaknesses only and does not cover all aspects of the provision.

Information about the inspection

27. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and 4 additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Operations Director, 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 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, 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.
28. 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)

ACACIA Training 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	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	863	863
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?*	na	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	na	
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?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3	
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?*	na	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
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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