

Swanlake Consulting Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 59018

Name of lead inspector: Diana Pinkney HMI

Last day of inspection: 26 August 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 15a Station Field Industrial Estate
Kidlington
Oxfordshire
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Information about the provider

1. Swanlake Consulting Ltd was established in 2006 and trades as ACE Training (ACE) at its premises in Kidlington. The company was initially created to maintain the provision in construction for learners that had previously been contracted to another provider. Since 2007 ACE has recruited learners to its programmes, all of which are publicly funded. ACE has not previously been inspected.
2. ACE has a contract with the Oxfordshire Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships in bricklaying and carpentry. A total of 48 learners are on the apprenticeship programmes, including 10 on programme-led apprenticeships who are not currently employed. Thirty learners are following carpentry apprenticeships. Most of the apprentices are aged 16 to 18 and all are male. Twelve are at the start of their apprenticeships.
3. ACE has a contract with the Young People’s Learning Agency to deliver Entry to Employment programmes (E2E) in bricklaying and carpentry. The E2E programme currently has four learners and was not inspected.
4. The company has a managing director and an operations director with three coordinators for the apprenticeships and E2E programmes. Three tutors and three training assistants deliver key and functional skills and the two vocational programmes.
5. The working population rate in Oxfordshire is 80% compared to 77% nationally. Most employment in the area is within the services industry, with 4% in construction compared to 4.5% in the South East and 4.8% nationally. According to the 2001 national census, minority ethnic groups in the area account for approximately 8% of the population compared to 9% in England.
6. ACE does not provide training on behalf of other providers.
7. No organisations provide training on behalf of ACE.

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09 |
|---|--|
| Provision for young learners: Entry to Employment | 43 learners |
| Employer provision: Apprenticeships | 30 apprentices |

Summary report

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

| | |
|---|----------------|
| Overall effectiveness of provision | Grade 4 |
| Capacity to improve | Grade 4 |
| | Grade |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 |
| Quality of provision | 4 |
| Leadership and management | 4 |
| Safeguarding | 3 |
| Equality and diversity | 4 |
| Subject Areas | Grade |
| Construction crafts | 4 |

Overall effectiveness

8. The overall effectiveness of ACE’s provision is inadequate. Learners’ achievement of qualifications to complete their apprenticeships is satisfactory, but not enough learners complete in the time planned. The quality of provision is inadequate. Coaching of learners’ practical skills and training in the workplace is good. However, assessment in the workplace is inadequate. Progress reviews, target setting, the monitoring of learners’ progress and planning of the taught certificate are inadequate. Leadership and management of the provision are inadequate. The planning and management of programmes do not sufficiently promote high standards. Self-assessment and other processes to improve the quality of the apprenticeship programmes are not effective. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory, but the promotion of equality and diversity is inadequate.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates were above the national rate in 2007/08 but declined significantly in 2008/09. Current success rates demonstrate an improving in-year trend and are at the national rate. Data indicates an in-year improvement in the proportion of apprentices achieving in the planned time but the rates are consistently low and below the national averages. Learners develop good practical skills.

- Learners feel safe and work safely in workshop areas. Health and safety in the workplace are satisfactory. Appropriate notices are displayed within the training centre to promote health and safety. Learners are effectively encouraged to make informed choices about their health, safety and welfare.
- Practical coaching and on-the-job training are good. Learners have a good relationship with their tutors and benefit from their vocational knowledge and industrial experience. Practical demonstrations are well paced with clear explanations and opportunities for learners to practise their skills and checking of learners' progress. Learners work well on their tasks and develop good practical skills.
- Planning for the technical certificate is inadequate. In carpentry there are no formal session plans and schemes of work. In some bricklaying theory sessions tutors do not plan different learning activities and outcomes to meet individual learners' needs. Session aims and objectives are not well defined or shared with learners at the start of sessions.
- Assessment of learners in the workplace is inadequate. Assessments are not systematically planned. Observation reports are too descriptive and lack judgements of learners' performance. Learners' action plans are not specific or sufficiently challenging to ensure completion in the agreed time. However, assessment of learners' portfolio evidence is satisfactory and initial assessment accurately identifies learners' individual support needs.
- Internal verification is not sufficiently robust. Tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified but lack experience. Verification is suitably planned throughout the programme. However, verifiers' reports and plans for improvement are not sufficiently specific. Progress towards achieving targets is not systematically monitored. Standardisation and sharing of good practice are insufficient.
- Learners' progress reviews are inadequate. Most action plans are weak and targets set do not challenge learners enough. The coordination of the progress reviews carried out at the centre and those in the workplace is weak. Systems to monitor learners' progress are not used effectively. Individual learning plans are not routinely used at progress reviews or systematically updated.
- Action plans to develop the provision are insufficiently rigorous and do not include dates when actions are to be implemented or progress monitored. Management of the provision is not sufficiently proactive or informed by data. The use of data is underdeveloped and target setting is not ambitious. Developments to provision do not sufficiently promote high standards or raise expectations.
- Arrangements to promote safeguarding are satisfactory. Most staff have undertaken external training, and this is planned for other staff. All staff have been subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and appropriate records are kept. The company has clear policies and procedures for safeguarding, with a designated safeguarding officer. Staff have received relevant training in health and safety.

- Equality and diversity are not sufficiently promoted or reinforced to learners. Staff have not received adequate training in equality and diversity. ACE has not developed strategies or targets to recruit learners from under-represented groups. However, suitable equalities policies and procedures, which refer to current legislation, are in place and ACE's mutual respect policy is effectively promoted.
- The company's engagement with users to support and promote improvement is satisfactory. Learners have suitable opportunities to evaluate their experience of the programme. The learners' forum is effective and ACE has responded well to the issues raised. Employers' views on the programme are actively sought and staff respond promptly to any queries and concerns.
- Arrangements to improve the quality of the apprenticeship programme are inadequate. ACE lacks effective processes for monitoring and evaluating performance, and planning for quality improvement is weak with no procedures to observe the quality of teaching, learning and progress reviews. Staff are not sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process and the report judgements are not sufficiently supported by evidence.

What does ACE need to do to improve further?

- Develop systematic arrangements to monitor the quality of programmes to include structured observations of the key learning processes and use the outcomes to inform quality improvement.
- Improve the systems to monitor and support learners' progress so that more learners achieve by their planned framework completion date.
- Develop structured and prioritised arrangements for action planning to support the effective and prompt implementation of developments to raise standards and the quality of provision.
- Improve the process for self-assessment to accurately evaluate the quality of provision. Develop systematic arrangements to fully involve all staff and identify robust evidence to support judgements in the self-assessment report.
- Ensure staff have a better understanding of equality and diversity to enable effective promotion and reinforcement to learners throughout their programmes.
- Improve the quality of learners' progress reviews to ensure effective integration of clear and appropriate targets to support apprentices completing their programme in the agreed time.
- Develop a more structured process for workplace assessment to improve assessment practice. Introduce a more effective system to record workplace observations and ensure learners are set suitably challenging targets to complete by the next assessment.
- Develop session planning to better meet the needs of learners by including relevant links between theory and practical training, to maximise learners' opportunities for reinforcement of their learning and development of skills.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- learning new skills
- making progress to develop their skills and confidence
- the support provided by their tutors
- the friendly staff and working atmosphere in the workshop.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the development of the programme to increase the number of theory lessons
- the written theory work developed to a higher level.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the professional approach of staff
- the regular communications they receive
- the way the apprenticeship programme is managed.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the amount and detail of information they receive to be better informed about learners' progress
- the opportunities to regularly and formally review their partnership working with the company.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

9. ACE has not demonstrated sufficient capacity to improve or established sustained improvement. Learner success rates have improved in the current year. However, the proportion of apprentices achieving in their planned time is low and consistently below national rates. Overall, the quality of teaching, training and assessment is inadequate, although some aspects are satisfactory and a few are good. Action planning to improve the provision is insufficiently developed. ACE does not have systematic arrangements for quality improvement and lacks processes to monitor the quality of teaching, learning and progress reviews.
10. The company has an appropriate management structure and sufficient staff and other resources. Staff are committed to securing improvements. However, several staff are inexperienced and most lack experience in identifying and developing quality improvement. Not all staff are sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is overly descriptive, ungraded and judgements are generally not sufficiently supported by evidence.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory overall. The success rate for apprentices declined from 66% in 2007/08 to 56% in 2008/09. However, the current rate of 72% indicates an improving trend and is now at the national rate. Outcomes for carpentry and bricklaying learners are broadly similar. In 2007/08 the proportion of apprentices achieving in the agreed time was below the national rate and declined significantly in 2008/09 to 26%. Current data indicates an improvement to 44% which is still below the national rate. In the current year, learners with additional learning needs and/or disabilities have higher success and timely success rates than other learners.
12. Learners enjoy their programmes. They increase their confidence and self-esteem. The development of their practical skills is good and their employability skills improve on the programme. Progression for programme-led apprentices is satisfactory. In 2008/09 and 2009/10 half of these learners progressed onto apprenticeships. Progression rates for the E2E programme are satisfactory. These increased from 45% in 2006/07 to 55% in 2007/08 and in both years approximately a quarter of E2E learners progressed onto apprenticeships.
13. Learners feel safe and work safely in workshop areas. Promotion of health and safety in the workplace is satisfactory. Appropriate notices are displayed within the training centre to promote health and safety. Learners are effectively encouraged to make informed choices about their health, safety and welfare.

The quality of provision

Grade 4

14. Practical coaching and on-the-job training are good. Practical demonstrations are well-paced, explanations are clear, progress is frequently monitored and learners are given time to practise their skills. Learners benefit from tutors who have appropriate industry expertise. Learners are motivated and work well on their individual tasks. Workshop resources are satisfactory.
15. Planning for the technical certificate is inadequate. Formal session plans and schemes of work are not sufficiently developed, particularly for carpentry. Bricklaying session plans do not always sufficiently integrate theory and practice. The planned reinforcement of functional skills for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. However, sessions are not planned to include different learning activities and outcomes to meet individual learners' needs. Lesson aims and objectives are not sufficiently well defined, nor shared with learners at the start of the session. In some sessions, targeting of oral questioning is insufficient to check learners' knowledge and understanding.
16. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy is effective. It accurately identifies individual support needs and provides an overview of learners' previous experience, and their personal and vocational goals. Individual learning plans identify targets for completion but are not used systematically to set short term targets.
17. Assessment of learners in the workplace is inadequate. Assessments are not routinely planned to identify what is to be assessed and how assessment will take place. Observation reports are too descriptive and lack judgements on learners' performance. Action plans are not specific or sufficiently challenging to promote progression to complete the qualification in the agreed time. Assessment of portfolio evidence is mainly satisfactory.
18. Internal verification is not sufficiently robust. Verification is suitably planned throughout the programme, using a variety of methods to monitor the quality of assessment. However, verifiers' reports are not sufficiently personalised and plans for improvement are not sufficiently specific. Progress towards achieving targets is not systematically monitored. Standardisation of assessment and sharing of good practice are insufficient. Tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified but lack experience.
19. Learners' progress reviews are inadequate. There is little coordination or integration of the separate progress reviews for the workplace, workplace evidence portfolios and technical certificate. Most action plans are not specific and targets are not sufficiently challenging or helpful to assist learners in making progress. Many progress reviews have no learner comments recorded. Portfolio reviews are inconsistent and not adequately planned. Promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity during workplace progress reviews are inadequate. Progress tracking systems are not used effectively to record targets. Individual learning plans are not routinely used or systematically

updated to plan and record workplace progress review dates. Not all workplace mentors receive copies of the progress reviews.

20. Overall, the provision meets the needs and interests of users. Arrangements for both training and assessment are flexible to suit learners' and employers' needs. The apprenticeship programmes are directly relevant to the work of employers' and learners' employability.
21. Partnership working is satisfactory. Links with employers are well maintained. Employers provide an appropriate range of opportunities for learners to develop their knowledge and skills. ACE has established useful links with local schools.
22. Guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Course tutors provide learners with helpful guidance on the different aspects of the apprenticeship framework. Additional learning support is effective and the support provided by workplace mentors is satisfactory. Induction is satisfactory overall. However, learners have little recall of the equality and diversity element of their induction.

Leadership and management

Grade 4

23. Leaders and managers do not sufficiently promote high standards in the quality of provision and learning programmes. The development of action planning is insufficiently rigorous and does not identify timescales for implementation. Management of provision is not sufficiently proactive or informed by data. The use of data is underdeveloped and target setting is not ambitious. Operational management and arrangements for staff appraisal and development are mainly satisfactory. Resources are developed appropriately to support learning.
24. ACE has satisfactory arrangements to promote safeguarding. Most staff have undertaken external training, and this is planned for other staff. All staff have been subject to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and appropriate records are kept. The company has clear policies and procedures for safeguarding, with a designated safeguarding officer. Potential safeguarding issues have been effectively addressed. Learners receive relevant information on safeguarding, including cyber bullying. However, ACE has not developed a policy for e-safety. All employers are provided with ACE's safeguarding policy. Staff have received relevant training in health and safety. Detailed health and safety audits of employers are carried out before learners start their work placements.
25. Equality and diversity are not sufficiently promoted or reinforced. Staff have not received adequate training in equality and diversity. ACE has not developed strategies or targets to recruit learners from under-represented groups. Achievement data for ethnicity, age and disability are adequately monitored, but the process does not include data for learners with learning difficulties. The previous achievement gap between learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other learners has closed in the current year. Informal monitoring of learners' outcomes within the two vocational areas is carried out. However, this is not sufficiently analysed to identify overall trends. Suitable

equalities policies and procedures, which refer to current legislation, are in place, including those for bullying and harassment, and complaints and appeals. All employers are required to use ACE's policy for equality and diversity if they do not have their own. The company's mutual respect policy for staff and learners is effectively promoted.

26. Engagement with users to support and promote improvement is satisfactory. Learners have suitable opportunities to evaluate their experience of the programme. Their responses are considered but not analysed. The learners' forum is effective and staff have responded well to the issues raised. The company's learner of the month award effectively recognises individual progress and achievement. Employers' views on the programme are actively sought and ACE responds promptly to any queries and concerns.
27. Arrangements to improve the quality of the apprenticeship programme are inadequate. Success rates for learners have improved in the current year. However, other key areas for improvement have not been sufficiently addressed. ACE lacks effective processes for monitoring and evaluating performance. Planning for quality improvement is weak. No internal procedures have been developed to observe the quality of teaching, learning and progress reviews. Auditing of learners' progress reviews is ineffective. Data are not used sufficiently to inform the self-assessment report and staff are not sufficiently involved in the self-assessment process.
28. Overall, ACE uses its available resources efficiently and effectively to secure value for money. Materials, resources and equipment used are satisfactory to meet learners' needs. The use of training assistants provides effective additional support for learners. ACE has a published commitment to sustainable waste management through recycling of suitable materials.

Information about the inspection

29. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's operations director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local Skills Funding Agency and data on learners and their achievement.
30. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions and assessments. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

ACE Training

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 | 16-18 Learner responsive | 19+ Learner responsive |
|--|----------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners Full-time learners Part-time learners | 52 | 36 | 16 |
| Overall effectiveness | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Capacity to improve | 4 | | |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 | 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? | 4 | | |
| How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development? | 3 | | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 3 | | |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | | | |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | | | |
| Quality of provision | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development? | 4 | | |
| 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? | 3 | | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 3 | | |
| Leadership and management | 4 | | |
| How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation? | 4 | | |
| <i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i> | | | |
| 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? | 4 | | |
| 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? | 4 | | |
| 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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