

# Swanlake Consulting Limited

## Reinspection monitoring visit report

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**Unique reference number:** 59018

**Name of lead inspector:** Andy Harris HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 9 March 2011

**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## **REINSPECTION MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS**

### **Context and focus of visit**

Swanlake Consulting Ltd trades as ACE Training (ACE) at premises near Oxford. ACE provides apprenticeships in bricklaying and carpentry, with a mix of training and assessment at ACE's training centre and in the workplace. A total of 37 learners are on the apprenticeship programmes, including 2 on programme-led apprenticeships who are not currently employed. Twenty-eight learners are undertaking a diploma in carpentry or brickwork as part of a foundation learning programme. That aspect was not inspected at the previous inspection and is not a primary focus of this monitoring visit.

At its inspection in August 2010, ACE's overall effectiveness was judged to be inadequate, as were capacity to improve and the inspected subject area of construction crafts. Outcomes were satisfactory, although there were concerns about whether learners were completing their qualifications by their planned end date. Quality of provision was inadequate; practical coaching and on-the-job training were good, but planning for the technical certificate and workplace assessment were inadequate. Leadership and management were judged to be inadequate.

The previous inspection report identified eight key areas for improvement, and these formed the basis for the monitoring visit's themes.

### **Themes**

#### **Self-assessment and improvement planning**

**What progress has been made in ensuring that the self-assessment process evaluates accurately the quality of provision, involves all staff and uses a range of sound evidence?**

**Reasonable progress**

The previous inspection listed concerns as to how self-assessment procedures were used to improve the quality of the apprenticeship programmes. The approach has now been improved. Staff are much more involved in the whole process. Learners continue to be involved through a learner forum. High-level data are now used more extensively and constructively to support findings. A revised format for the final self-assessment report aids a more objective approach to judging performance, rather than just a description of activities that was a feature of the previous report. The final report is more evaluative than preceding versions and key strengths and weaknesses are satisfactorily identified. Some of the more recent initiatives such as the developing system of observing teaching and learning, or more thorough auditing of key activities, are not yet used in the self-assessment process. However, importantly, the process, the report, associated discussions and action planning are all helping to improve many aspects of ACE's provision.

## Outcomes for learners

**What progress has been made in improving the prompt achievement of qualifications by construction apprentices, and better monitoring of all learners' current progress?**

**Reasonable progress**

Overall outcomes for learners were judged to be satisfactory at the previous inspection, but there were concerns that too few learners completed in the time planned. Progress towards achieving targets was not systematically monitored. In the relatively short period since the inspection, formal published rates of successful completions have not changed materially. However, ACE's data indicate that performance in the present year is at a slightly better level than at a similar point in the previous year. Current learners are progressing satisfactorily. Early leavers from the programme, most of whom have left or been withdrawn because of personal reasons, will inevitably have an impact on overall success rates, but not yet to the extent where rates must be lower than previous years. The monitoring of current learners' progress has been much improved. A progress-tracking system is being used more effectively. A series of progress reviews is scheduled more effectively, ensuring that aspects of a learner's performance will, in future, be reviewed at no more than six-weekly intervals. Results of monitoring and reviews are considered in detail, notably at monthly individual discussions between managers and staff. Learners who are behind schedule are rightly identified and actions put in place to encourage speedier completion.

## Quality of provision

**What progress has been made in ensuring that session planning is more detailed, better linking practical and theory elements and including a range of learning activities?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, schemes of work and session plans have been introduced for practical and theory sessions, to meet some of the concerns noted at that inspection. Schemes of work include all required qualification content and corresponding session plans identify learning aims and objectives together with teacher and learner activities. Planning for practical training is more detailed and effective than that for theory sessions. Practical training includes a range of different learning activities that are motivating, enjoyable and directly relate to learners' workplace activities. Theory sessions are too teacher led and do not engage learners sufficiently in a range of activities to ensure they remain motivated and engaged in learning. Planning for theory teaching, although improved since the last inspection, does not fully consider individual needs and ability levels and consequently some learners are not sufficiently challenged by the pace or content of sessions. Links between theory and practical sessions are more evident than was the case at the previous inspection, although theory teaching is not sufficiently focused on developing the knowledge and understanding required to underpin the practical skills that learners are developing.

**What progress has been made in improving the quality and impact of learners' progress reviews?****Reasonable progress**

Learners' progress reviews were judged to be inadequate at the previous inspection. The quality of reviews has improved since then and learners are now more aware of the extent of their progress. Reviews are now completed for all apprentices at frequent intervals. Separate reviews are completed for the technical certificate component of the apprenticeship framework and for the work-based qualification aspect. A further all-encompassing review is completed that details the extent of learners' progress for all aspects of the framework and this review now includes comments from tutors, learners and employers. Overall, the reviews have a better focus on when the learner should be completing the whole, or parts, of their programme. Reviews are generally becoming more useful in informing learners exactly what they need to do to progress further. However, the targets set on some action plans still remain insufficiently specific and do not detail precisely enough what learners need to do and by when. Progress reviews do now check learners' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues and are now copied to employers, learners and tutors where previously this was not the case.

**What progress has been made in developing a more structured process for workplace assessment?****Significant progress**

Workplace assessment was inadequate at the last inspection with assessments not routinely planned or completed. Following a thorough review of this process, considerable improvements have been made and a much more structured process is now in place. Assessors are now allocated specific time to conduct assessments in the workplace. Learners and employers are more aware of the evidence required from the workplace. Assessors plan work-based assessment visits well and frequently visit learners on site. Learners' portfolios contain a variety of evidence from the workplace including direct observation reports from assessors. Observation reports provide good evidence that is well matched to qualification competence criteria. Assessors have a clear understanding of work-based evidence requirements and plan assessment visits with learners to ensure effective use of time. Since the previous inspection all learners have benefited from a workplace assessment visit and most portfolios now contain valid evidence following assessment activity in the workplace.

**What progress has been made in developing systematic arrangements to monitor the quality of programmes?****Reasonable progress**

Quality assurance arrangements have improved and continue to be strengthened after weaknesses were noted at the previous inspection. Learners' progress reviews are now quality assured and improvements are evident in the content and effectiveness of reviews since the previous inspection. Learner forum meetings and staff team meetings are now frequently held and resulting actions have improved aspects of provision and the learners' experience. Data are being used more effectively to monitor and improve provision. Overall learner tracking and monitoring records have been improved and an electronic tracking system is being better used by all staff. Plans to monitor the quality of teaching and learning formally and to monitor the quality of assessment practice are well advanced and are due for

imminent implementation. This was a particular area for improvement at the previous inspection and its full implementation will be an important part of ACE's quality improvement activities. Internal verification practice has improved since the previous inspection, although internal verification arrangements for brickwork are not as effective as those for carpentry and joinery.

## **Leadership and management**

**What progress has been made in setting up arrangements to ensure that any action planning is effective, and promptly implemented?** **Reasonable progress**

The prompt implementation of improvements was judged to be an area for improvement at the previous inspection. A great deal of effort has been put into this aspect, and much better arrangements are now in place. They are beginning to have a positive impact on the provision. Formal improvement activities are now driven by a detailed but clear quality improvement plan, replacing a more general action plan. The improvement plan has been derived with helpful external advice, but importantly does reflect the involvement of staff at all levels and is rightly linked with the self-assessment process. However, the plan is still in the final stages of completion; the initial emphasis was on work that would have a direct impact on learners and there is still some work to be completed on leadership and management improvements. Those responsible for actions in the plan are clearly identified, and their contribution is routinely monitored, as is the overall progress of the plan. A strategic plan is now being developed which is intended to aid the planning and monitoring of higher-level targets. Formal processes have not restricted routine improvements; for instance, since the previous inspection there have been significant prompt improvements in the training accommodation.

**What progress has been made in ensuring that staff have a better understanding of equality and diversity and there is better promotion of relevant aspects to learners?** **Significant progress**

Equality and diversity were not sufficiently promoted or reinforced at the time of the previous inspection. Since then there has been significant change and progress. All staff have undergone training delivered by external specialists. This was a comprehensive programme and has had a very positive impact on staff in terms of their understanding of, and empathy with, the principles of equality and diversity. Learners on foundation learning courses continue to attend monthly formal sessions that develop their understanding of equality and diversity, but now apprentices also have similar monthly sessions. Learners' understanding is now better reinforced in apprentice progress reviews. Instead of a basic 'are you being treated fairly?' question, there is now constructive discussion based on a series of scenarios, helped by the staff's better understanding of the topic. Procedures, posters, policies and the approach on induction have all had minor, but appropriate, updating. Increased work with schools and an emphasis in the strategic plan are aimed at improving the recruitment of under-represented groups.

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