

# Access Skills Ltd

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

26 February–1 March 2019

Overall effectiveness		Good	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>	Adult learning programmes	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Good</b>	Apprenticeships	<b>Good</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>		
Outcomes for learners	<b>Good</b>		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Not previously inspected	

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Leaders have a clear strategy to train effective leaders and managers of care settings. They have developed highly effective partnerships with employers to achieve this aim.
- The proportion of apprentices who achieve in the time allocated is high.
- Leaders and managers have adapted the curriculum so that learners and apprentices develop the specific skills and knowledge that employers require.
- Learners and apprentices benefit from their education and work diligently to complete the wide range of distance-learning activities and assessments.
- Almost all apprentices continue with their current employer, move into more senior positions or enter higher-level learning.
- Tutors are well-qualified and experienced specialist practitioners. They challenge learners to think deeply about their practice, helping them to improve the service they provide to their clients.
- Learners and apprentices receive helpful information and guidance that enable them to make informed choices about their future career options.
- Leaders have not implemented sufficiently their strategy to ensure that all learners and apprentices develop their English and mathematics skills.
- Board members have too little experience of education to enable them fully to support and challenge leaders to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Not all apprentices are sufficiently aware of the specific dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Access Skills Ltd specialises in providing management qualifications to the care sector. The company has a head office in Birmingham and operates with mainly small and medium-sized businesses across England. After several years of delivering qualifications with subcontracted partners, they were awarded their own contract in 2016 to offer level 5 apprenticeships in care management. Leaders secured a contract in 2018 to deliver advanced learner loans for adults in the care sector. They provide work-based vocational health and social care diploma programmes at levels 3 to 5 across England.
- Currently, apprentices on level 5 programmes make up the largest cohort of learners. These are mostly employed in privately owned registered care providers. At the time of inspection, there were 361 level 5 apprentices and 136 adults on advanced learner loans. There are currently no higher-level standards-based apprenticeships available.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers must ensure that assessors:
  - identify accurately apprentices' and adults' starting points, so that they clarify their individual English and mathematics skills needs
  - use this information to plan learning so that all apprentices and adults develop the specific English and mathematics skills they need to achieve their potential.
- Leaders must ensure that trainers and coaches reinforce the dangers of radicalisation and extremism with learners and apprentices so that they can protect themselves and their clients from all types of abuse.
- Leaders must ensure that the governing body has sufficient educational expertise to hold them fully to account.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders have successfully implemented their clear strategy to support the care sector by training effective leaders and managers across the country. They have developed close working relationships with key partners. These partnerships help to tackle substantial skills shortages within the health and social care sector, and to improve the quality of care.
- Leaders consult with their employers and their sector experts to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of the sector closely and helps learners to become registered managers. Managers, tutors and assessors have extensive and in-depth experience of, and effective links with, the care sector. Leaders have focused on recruiting sector specialists to ensure that learners develop relevant and up-to-date skills, knowledge and understanding. Most assessors work for the provider on a part-time basis and continue to work within the care sector. Several staff are very well qualified and are inspectors for registered care provider inspections.
- Leaders have designed a curriculum model that supports learners across the country in a wide range of care settings. They have created a range of assignment activity briefs that link closely to learners' job roles. Managers appoint assessors based on their specialist experience to support learners. Assessors use the briefs to assess learners' and apprentices' performance at work, based on the assessor's expertise. For example, a dementia care specialist assessor will assess apprentices with clients who have dementia. As a result, apprentices receive high-quality support and feedback that help them to make good progress and develop their skills and techniques quickly.
- Leaders recognise the need to identify learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics abilities. They identify accurately the starting level of each learner and apprentice. Those with low skills are signposted to external agencies to improve their skills. However, leaders accept that they have yet to implement fully their English and mathematics strategy to ensure that all learners and apprentices make the progress they should in these subjects.
- Managers monitor closely the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which leads to improvement. For example, they scrutinise findings from formal and informal observations, learners' and employers' views, and reviews between managers and assessors to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning practice. However, managers have been slow to identify the insufficient support to develop learners' and apprentices' English and mathematics skills.
- Assessors and coaches benefit from the range of development opportunities to improve their practice. Development days occur twice yearly and focus on meeting quality assurance processes, sharing best practice and curriculum changes required by sector developments. As a result, assessors and staff provide learners and apprentices with appropriate and effective feedback and support to help them achieve their qualifications.
- Leaders have made sure that learners and apprentices receive effective careers advice and guidance to ensure that they can develop new skills, knowledge and behaviours. They have developed strong links with most employers, who ensure that the information is up to date. Consequently, most learners and apprentices complete their qualifications

and continue in their roles.

- Managers use their electronic monitoring system effectively to ensure that staff, assessors and learners receive information and feedback quickly. As a result, assessors and coaches have up-to-date information to take swift action and help learners and apprentices stay motivated and on track with their learning. However, leaders do not analyse sufficiently the wealth of information available to ensure that managers identify all concerns; for example, the quality of feedback and targets to help all learners and apprentices improve their English and mathematics skills.
- The formal self-assessment is broadly accurate. Leaders involve all managers. They carefully review employers' and learners' views and evaluate the key aspects of provision in depth. However, leaders focus too heavily on outcomes and process rather than on the quality of learners' experience and wider skills development.

### **The governance of the provider**

- Leaders have established appropriate governance arrangements. The chair of the board is highly experienced in retail and health businesses.
- The board receives the appropriate information on leaders' performance in relation to their key performance indicators. Consequently, the chair challenges leaders effectively, and particularly in relation to the financial probity of the business. However, leaders have been slow to ensure enough educational expertise on the board to enable governors to provide support and challenge to drive further improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All relevant staff have Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Tutors and assessors benefit from up-to-date training covering all elements, including the risks of radicalisation and extremism, which helps them to protect learners and apprentices. Staff, learners and apprentices are clear about their responsibilities to themselves and their clients.
- Managers record and act appropriately on information on safeguarding and concerns about personal issues affecting learners. Leaders and managers have strengthened support for learners by establishing three 'wellness' champions to support learners' health and mental well-being. As a result, where needed, apprentices receive the appropriate help and referrals to other agencies, keeping them on track with their work.
- Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding, British values, equality and diversity. In a few cases, learners and employers do not know how to apply the risks of radicalisation and extremism to their workplace, clients and local community.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good. Learners and apprentices benefit from effective learning activities that help them to develop confidence in their skills and to achieve within the time allocated. Learners and apprentices demonstrate high-level management skills in the workplace and make a good contribution to the needs of their businesses. As a result of their training, they supervise staff, manage partnerships

and create discharge care plans for clients with a diverse range of needs. Learners and apprentices who achieve their qualifications apply these skills confidently in senior management positions.

- Highly qualified and experienced specialist assessors challenge learners to deepen their knowledge and improve their academic skills. Assessment is frequent and thorough. It includes workplace visits, assignments and webinars. Learners and apprentices benefit from clear and helpful feedback on their written work and practical assessments to improve their work. The large majority of employers provide learners and apprentices with supportive feedback on their progress. However, in a few cases, employers do not provide learners with enough feedback for them to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Learners and apprentices develop their independent learning skills well, which prepares them well for continuing employment or further study. Most learners are located at a distance from the provider and work on shift patterns. They use effectively a high-quality online resource to access policies, procedures and legislative updates. Consequently, most apprentices and learners work confidently on their own and make good progress towards achieving their qualification.
- Learners and apprentices receive effective and well-coordinated support from a central team of assessors and coaches. Assessors monitor closely learners who are at risk of failure. These learners receive swift support, such as telephone assessment, to achieve units on topics including complaints, health and safety, and supervision. Assessors work sensitively with learners and apprentices who have personal problems and often extend their deadlines to reduce the pressure of combining study, work and personal commitments. However, a few learners and apprentices struggle with academic writing and do not have sufficient help to gain confidence in using the study skills necessary to achieve quickly enough.
- Learners and apprentices know the progress they are making and understand the structure of the programme. They have a sound induction that includes an appropriate initial assessment to assess the level of their English and mathematics skills. Learning plans take appropriate account of previous learning and vocational practice. Although learners receive focused targets to complete assignments, these targets are not always sufficiently precise to help learners rectify individual weaknesses in their English and mathematics skills.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

**Good**

- Learners and apprentices take pride in their work and understand how their programme will help them improve their skills, knowledge and behaviours. They develop a thorough understanding and knowledge of their work and apply academic theory into their practice effectively. All apprentices and learners undertake job roles at an appropriate level to ensure that they can meet the requirements of the qualification.
- Learners and apprentices receive appropriate information about career options within the health and care sector. They understand how programmes will help improve their skills in their current and future roles. Although most apprentices and learners remain with their current employer, a few decide to top up their learning and move on to degree or postgraduate courses.

- Learners and apprentices gain substantial benefit from their education. They work diligently to complete the wide range of distance-learning activities and assessments. Consequently, they develop the appropriate personal, social and employability skills required for their supervisory and management roles. For example, learners and apprentices learn about managing teams. They become confident in their communications, dealing with issues such as how to challenge conflict effectively.
- Learners and apprentices make good progress towards achieving the main parts of their qualification. They develop their communication and written skills to an appropriate level for the requirements of the qualification. Additionally, they improve their digital skills, giving them access to online resources and social media to help them with their course work.
- Learners and apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of effective relationships at work. They ensure that all staff and clients are treated with respect and know the potential issues raised by bullying, including cyber bullying, and harassment. Learners and apprentices tackle swiftly any incidents of discrimination or bullying in the workplace, but these happen rarely.
- Apprentices demonstrate a particularly strong understanding of safeguarding and how to protect themselves and their clients from harm. However, in a few cases, apprentices are not able to demonstrate sufficiently a full understanding of the potential threats posed from extremist groups.

## Outcomes for learners

**Good**

- All apprentices follow a level 5 diploma in health and social care. Around three quarters make good progress and achieve their qualifications in the time allocated. The rate at which apprentices achieve their qualification in the time allocated is high. Most adult learners follow the same level 5 programme, with a few following level 3 and 4 health and social care courses. This is the provider's first year of delivering these qualifications through adult learner loans. Most adult learners are progressing well and are on target to achieve their qualifications.
- Most learners and apprentices produce work of an appropriate standard for the level of qualification. In a few cases, their work is particularly good, demonstrating a proficient academic writing style and their deep understanding of their subject.
- Although learners and apprentices make good progress towards achieving their main qualifications, a substantial minority do not develop sufficiently their English and mathematic skills to ensure that they cope well with management-level tasks such as report writing, presentations and budget plans.
- There are no differences between the achievement of different groups of learners.
- On completion of their programme, most learners and apprentices remain with their employer. A majority move on to more complex roles or gain promotion to senior positions. Around one in five move on to higher-level learning, including programmes in leadership and management.

## Types of provision

### Adult learning programmes

**Good**

- Leaders provide adult loans-funded health and social care diplomas at levels 3 to 5 for employees working in, or aspiring to work in, leadership roles within the care sector. There are currently 136 learners on programme, predominantly at level 5. The diploma programmes meet the needs of learners and their employers very well.
- Leaders use public funding effectively to enable employees to access relevant training and gain qualifications to enhance the quality of the health and social care sector. In the current year – the provider’s first year of delivering funded health and social care qualifications to adults – most learners are making at least the progress expected of them.
- Learners receive a useful induction and an initial assessment of their prior learning to ensure that they are placed on the appropriate pathway. As a result, learners are able to draw on their current experience and apply their learning at work. Where appropriate, assessors adapt the choice of subjects better to reflect learners’ roles and aspirations.
- Learners receive effective and impartial careers guidance, raising their awareness of the options available to them. This guidance includes, for example, further learning opportunities, more complex activities, such as budgetary control, and roles they might pursue.
- Learners develop skills that are useful in employment. They apply their skills in their work well. For example, learners on level 5 courses complete a research project to identify how a particular practice can be improved in their setting. These projects include developing systems for improving communication and complaints processes. Additionally, learners develop confidence in their ability to manage others, influence practices in their workplace and provide improved standards of care for their clients.
- Assessors monitor the progress of all learners very closely and promptly support any who are at risk of falling behind. They provide them with effective mentoring and additional time to help them stay on track, especially when they face personal challenges or demanding work pressures. Consequently, most learners are motivated to catch up and achieve their qualification.
- The standard of learners’ work is appropriate to the type and level of qualifications. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of theory and knowledge in the workplace in their written assignments and professional discussions. However, assessors do not use information about learners’ starting points in English and mathematics sufficiently well to set them targets to improve these skills. Additionally, a few assessors do not routinely identify and help learners rectify mistakes in their written work.
- Learners develop a good knowledge and understanding of safeguarding, at work and in their communities. For example, they recognise the dangers of financial abuse of vulnerable adults and know how to meet the requirements of data protection in a care setting. However, learners do not consistently demonstrate sufficient awareness of the dangers of radicalisation in a care setting.
- Learners are given a wide range of opportunities to explore and recognise equality of opportunity and to celebrate diversity. For example, when considering end-of-life care,

learners know the importance of meeting the religious and spiritual needs of individuals.

## Apprenticeships

**Good**

- The provider offers apprenticeships in health and social care nationally. Some 361 apprentices are currently working towards health and social care apprenticeship frameworks at level 5. The specialist provision enables apprentices to become registered care managers in health care settings. The apprenticeship qualification greatly benefits employers by meeting their skills and regulatory requirements.
- Leaders and managers coordinate, very effectively, apprentices' learning and assessment across England. They ensure that their apprenticeships meet the principles of effective apprenticeship provision and that on- and off-the-job training are managed well.
- Well-qualified and experienced assessors have high expectations for their apprentices and are ambitious for them to succeed. They provide high-quality workshops and webinars that help apprentices to deepen their specialist knowledge of current procedures and practices in the care sector. These include the new General Data Protection Regulation legislation and the importance of keeping clients' personal information confidential. Consequently, apprentices become highly effective care professionals who benefit their employers.
- Most apprentices develop new skills and knowledge that they apply confidently in the workplace. A broad range of useful and well-designed online resources helps apprentices to make frequent and meaningful links between theoretical and practical tasks. As a result, they become more effective leaders, managing poor practice and dealing with challenging behaviour confidently. They also help and motivate staff to improve the care they provide to clients, significantly increasing their well-being.
- Most assessors use their specialist knowledge very well to deepen apprentices' understanding during observation visits and very thorough professional discussions. They make good use of probing questions to assess learning and to deepen apprentices' understanding of topics such as recruitment and selection of staff and the necessary pre-employment checks required to safeguard their clients. As a result, most apprentices extend their skills and abilities rapidly.
- Assessors review apprentices' progress frequently. They set specific short-term targets that encourage most apprentices to complete their work on time. Assessors use an electronic portfolio system effectively to track apprentices' progress. Managers capture this information and use it well to arrange remedial support for apprentices who fall behind with their studies. As a result, most apprentices receive the appropriate help to get back on track with their learning.
- Most apprentices develop good independent learning skills that help them to make good progress in their studies. They develop confidence in their digital skills through editing and uploading their written assignments into an electronic portfolio. They also enjoy taking part in webinars and communicating best practice with other care professionals through a social media group.
- The standard of most apprentices' written work is appropriate to their level of study. Most assessors provide apprentices with helpful feedback to improve the standard of their work. However, in a few cases, assessors do not provide sufficient and specific guidance



for apprentices to develop their English and mathematics skills beyond their starting points. They do not routinely correct spelling and grammatical errors in apprentices' written work. As a result, these apprentices continue to make the same mistakes and do not improve the standard of their academic writing sufficiently.

- Apprentices receive useful advice and guidance that ensure they are placed on the right pathway, and assessors give them accurate information about their future career options in the sector. Most apprentices remain in employment, gain promotion or continue into higher levels of study.
- Apprentices have a thorough understanding of individuals' needs, their rights, and British values such as democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They demonstrate these principles when managing teams, dealing with confrontation in the workplace and providing effective care for their clients with diverse needs. However, in a few cases, apprentices are not fully aware of the dangers associated with radicalisation and extremism and how these relate to their personal lives and care settings.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	1248054
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	480
Principal/CEO	Neil Crawford
Telephone number	01215 102169
Website	<a href="http://www.accessskills.co.uk">www.accessskills.co.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	-	-	-	-	-	18	-	118
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-	361	
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	-							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Richard Deane, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Barbara Hughes	Ofsted Inspector
Beth Selwood	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn Townsley	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

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