

# Acacia Training and Development Limited

Report following a monitoring visit to a 'requires improvement' provider

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**Unique reference number:** 50303

**Name of lead inspector:** Helen Flint, HMI

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**Type of provider:** Independent learning provider

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## **Monitoring visit: main findings**

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

Acacia Training and Development Limited (ATD) was inspected in March 2018. At that time, inspectors judged the overall effectiveness of the provision to require improvement.

The focus of this monitoring visit was to evaluate the progress that leaders and managers have made in addressing the main areas for improvement identified at the time of the last full inspection.

ATD remains a wholly owned subsidiary of Somerset Care Limited and has learners across the south-west, mostly in Devon and Somerset. There are training centres in Plymouth and Taunton. Most learners are apprentices, the large majority of which are working in health and social care or childcare. There are a small number of apprentices working in business administration, management, hairdressing and accountancy. ATD subcontracts a small proportion of apprenticeship provision in health and social care, childcare, refrigeration and hairdressing. Most apprentices study either at level 2 or level 3, and a small number at level 4 or level 5.

ATD provides courses for adults in Plymouth. These are mostly short courses in subjects such as business and health and social care, or functional skills. ATD also offers courses to help people who are unemployed to gain skills or find work.

### **Themes**

#### **What progress have leaders and managers made in identifying weaknesses and monitoring the effectiveness of actions for improvement?**

#### **Reasonable progress**

The comprehensive improvement strategy introduced by senior managers after the previous inspection is having a positive impact on the quality of provision. A series of working groups is now addressing the main areas for improvement effectively. The groups are also contributing well to the self-assessment process by identifying further actions required for improvement.

Senior managers have successfully implemented revised quality assurance systems. They have ensured that these are better understood and used more effectively by managers and staff. As a result, all staff have an improved and more realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their provision. They also better understand the part they play in driving improvement. For example, assessors of health and social care standards apprenticeships have improved their understanding of new apprenticeship standards because of carefully focused training. Managers have also purchased additional resources to improve the administration of programmes and support apprentices' learning.

Managers, including ATD's board, regularly monitor the action plans they receive. These plans are useful in informing senior managers of the progress being made, but senior managers do not link these actions plans together or identify the impact of ongoing actions sufficiently well to fully inform their decision making. They do not use their self-assessment process report to evaluate their provision critically enough.

Managers now meet regularly to monitor the progress made in each adult and apprenticeship programme at each level. They have a full awareness of the achievement and attendance of learners.

**What progress has been made in developing stimulating and challenging tasks for learners and apprentices to enable them to develop new skills and knowledge and produce higher standards of work?**

**Reasonable progress**

Learners, apprentices and employers are clear about the new skills and knowledge developed as a result of ATD courses. Adult learners gain confidence in contributing in the classroom and finding employment.

Staff now provide apprentices with more useful and individual off-the-job training which apprentices and employers value. For example, level 5 health and social care apprentices attend workshops at the Taunton centre which successfully improve and extend their skills and knowledge. They gain a deeper knowledge of policies and procedures which they apply effectively in care homes. The challenging off-the-job training provided for level 3 accountancy apprentices at the Plymouth centre successfully stimulates their interest in the subjects they study. They develop their technical vocabulary and their understanding of taxation, which they use well in the workplace. Level 2 refrigeration apprentices undertake complex tasks which prepare them well for moving on to level 3.

ATD staff provide a large proportion of off-the-job training for apprentices in the workplace. Staff now visit apprentices more frequently than in the past. They set and assess apprentices' work frequently and monitor apprentices' completion of tasks effectively. As a result, apprentices gain new knowledge, skills and behaviours which they use well at work. For example, level 2 health and social care apprentices gain a detailed awareness of the personal needs of residents. These apprentices are well equipped with the right skills to manage clients with different behavioural challenges. Level 2 hairdressing apprentices develop their skills in colouring, perming and blow-drying hair to salon standard; level 4 business management apprentices produce high standards of written work, evaluating different business communication theories.

Not all assessors or tutors set apprentices or adult learners work which challenges them to think more deeply, and some tasks are too easy. Assessors do not always make effective use of their real work experience to enliven and enrich discussions

with apprentices. As a result, not all apprentices are yet producing work at the standard of which they are capable.

**What progress has been made in developing apprentices' English and mathematics skills which are relevant to their jobs and the sector in which they are employed?**

**Reasonable progress**

Since the previous inspection, staff have developed useful resources for English and mathematics functional skills which more closely reflect the knowledge and skills needed by apprentices in their workplaces. For example, an English activity for childcare apprentices was themed around World Book Day. Functional skills tutors now visit apprentices in the workplace to assess their progress in English and mathematics and set them carefully chosen work to improve their skills. Additionally, tutors provide individual tuition in the centres, which now focuses effectively on the specific skills needed by apprentices, for example writing care plans.

Assessors now capture apprentices' development in English and mathematics in more useful and detailed action plans, which they use to set appropriate targets to help apprentices make progress towards their qualifications. Assessors' feedback on written work now identifies more effectively how apprentices can improve their writing skills.

More apprentices are developing important communications skills than previously, which employers value. These include giving business presentations, dealing with clients and producing written reports. However, assessors are yet to involve employers regularly in detailed discussions on the progress of apprentices' English and mathematics skills.

Staff do not always make clear to new apprentices how their skills in English and mathematics will be developed. Managers have invested recently in new software to assess apprentices' English and mathematics knowledge at the start of their apprenticeships. Managers plan to use this system to determine what help apprentices need to improve their knowledge.

Staff are not yet developing the wider skills and knowledge of apprentices who have already attained the qualifications they need. However, a small proportion of apprentices who have achieved level 1 functional skills qualifications go on to study at level 2, even if it is not a requirement of their apprenticeship.

**What progress have leaders and managers made in monitoring the progress of apprentices effectively to ensure that a higher proportion achieve their qualifications within agreed timescales?**

**Reasonable progress**

Managers now monitor the progress apprentices make through their qualifications effectively. They identify apprentices who are falling behind or taking too long to complete their apprenticeships. They put appropriate interventions in place to help these apprentices to catch up. As a result, managers are successfully reducing the numbers of apprentices who have not completed their apprenticeship within the time they are allowed.

A higher proportion of apprentices have achieved their apprenticeship so far this year than at the same point last year. The first small cohort of accountancy apprentices on standards-based apprenticeships have now completed, two-thirds of whom achieved distinctions.

A large majority of apprentices have completed their functional skills in English and mathematics. Managers are aware of individual apprentices' achievements in these subjects. However, they do not yet routinely monitor or analyse the overall performance of apprentices at different levels to help them determine further areas for improvement.

Senior managers have successfully reduced the large number of apprentices who are taking a break in learning from their apprenticeships. They are now more stringent in applying the criteria for agreeing such suspensions. Although around a tenth of apprentices are currently on a break in learning, many of these are on maternity leave.

**What progress has been made in evaluating the impact of training on learners and apprentices?**

**Insufficient progress**

Managers have recently introduced a process for capturing what happens to learners and apprentices once they have completed their courses at ATD. This is effective for adult learners on employability programmes but is not yet embedded for apprentices or adults on other courses. Managers do not routinely gather and analyse information on what apprentices go on to do next and so are not able to evaluate the success of their apprenticeships.

Staff gather useful feedback from apprentices and employers on the impact of training for current apprentices. Managers use this information effectively to make appropriate changes to their courses or to provide better support for apprentices in the workplace.

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