

# Abacus Training Group

Independent learning provider

## Inspection dates

30 April–2 May 2019

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Requires improvement</b>	Adult learning programmes	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</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 provider that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers do not use data sufficiently well to monitor the quality of the provision and the progress learners are making.
- Tutor assessors do not take into account learners' prior skills and knowledge when planning learning in order to provide learners with sufficient challenge to meet their needs.
- Tutors do not develop learners' written English and mathematics skills well enough to prepare them for the next stages in their career.
- Leaders and managers do not ensure that the improvements required are carried out quickly enough to benefit current learners.
- Tutor assessors' written feedback does not help learners know what they need to do to improve their written work.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Leaders respond flexibly to provide courses that meet the needs of employers and learners in the area.
- Tutor assessors provide effective coaching support, which develops learners' practical skills well.
- Learners' pass rates on qualifications are very high.
- Learners develop the practical skills to meet clients' needs within the beauty therapy and personal fitness sectors very well.
- Almost all learners continue from their courses into employment or self-employment.

## **Full report**

### **Information about the provider**

- Abacus Training Group (Abacus) is a privately owned training provider. It was established in 2008. The head office is based in Peacehaven near Brighton. Training takes place across the south east in employers' premises or in other commercial settings such as salons and gyms.
- Abacus offers courses from level 3 through to level 5 for adults using advanced learner loans. These courses include diplomas in health and social care, fitness instructing and personal training, and beauty therapy treatments. Abacus also provides commercial training and consultancy support.

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

- Leaders and managers should improve their use of data to better monitor learners' attendance and progress.
- Leaders and managers should develop the skills and knowledge of tutors so that they are better able to improve learners' skills in mathematics and English.
- Tutor assessors should improve the quality of teaching and assessment by ensuring that they use information about learners' prior knowledge to plan learning that meets learners' individual needs.
- Tutor assessors should make sure that the feedback they provide to learners helps them to improve their work.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of their provision but they have been too slow in bringing about the improvements needed within teaching and assessment. Their self-assessment report accurately describes weaknesses in the provision but managers have not implemented quickly enough the quality improvement plans to benefit current learners.
- Leaders and managers have not ensured that tutor assessors plan for learning well enough to meet the needs of learners. They have not monitored the records of learners' reviews and progress carried out by assessor tutors to ensure that they are completed fully and are consistently good.
- Leaders and managers do not use data reports and systems well enough to gain a clear oversight of the quality of the provision and to monitor learners' progress. Leaders and managers do analyse learners' attendance data in order to develop a clear view of how well learners attend. Learner and employer views are gathered but the results are not analysed to inform improvements.
- Managers undertake appropriate quality assurance activities, such as observations of teaching, learning and assessment. However, their observations do not focus sufficiently on learners and their progress and managers do not implement the process rigorously enough. Managers do not ensure that actions for improvement, identified during observations, are implemented consistently. Also, managers do not always undertake staff appraisals where they can review the performance of their staff and focus on areas for improvement.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that pass rates on courses are very high and have made sure that almost all the learners within the current academic have been retained on their courses.
- Leaders have recruited tutor assessors who are effective in developing learners' practical skills. Leaders support tutor assessors well with their professional development to ensure that their professional practice is kept up to date. However, leaders have not yet been successful in improving tutor assessors' written English skills.
- Leaders enjoy strong and effective relationships with employers in the area. Information gained from these employers helps leaders to plan a curriculum to address employment gaps and to establish very good progression opportunities for learners. Leaders respond flexibly to meet the needs of employers and learners by, for example, providing courses at weekends where this is required.
- Managers and tutor assessors ensure that learners receive appropriate and detailed information, advice and guidance before they start their programmes. The large majority of learners appreciate the benefits that their training will bring regarding future employment or promotions.

### The governance of the provider

- Leaders make good use of a number of external consultants that know Abacus well and provide the leaders with advice and guidance. However, leaders do not benefit from

consistent external scrutiny in order and to hold leaders to account, to provide appropriate challenge and ensure that improvements required take place in a timely manner.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have ensured that effective and comprehensive safeguarding arrangements are in place and implemented. Managers conduct thorough checks when recruiting staff to ensure their suitability.
- All staff are trained in safeguarding and are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Leaders and managers ensure that learners have a good awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Managers undertake appropriate risk assessments for all the training venues and activities. Learners receive effective training on safe working practices relevant to their occupational area and develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.

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

## **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies too much across the provision and, too often, is not of a high enough quality.
- Tutor assessors do not take sufficient account of what learners already know and can do when planning learning. As a result, tutor assessors do not provide learners with the challenge needed to produce work of the quality that they are capable of producing. A small minority of learners do not benefit from enough teaching from their tutor assessors. Consequently, they make slow progress in developing their understanding of the theory required on the course.
- The majority of tutor assessors do not help learners to improve their written English. Consequently, learners continue to make the same mistakes in spelling and punctuation. The vast majority of assessors make too many spelling and punctuation errors themselves, and do not provide learners with examples of good written English.
- Tutor assessors do not ensure that learners consistently receive clear and meaningful feedback on their written work to help them to improve. Too much written feedback does not identify learners' gaps in knowledge so that they know what they need to learn or how to improve their written work.
- Assessors meet learners regularly to review their progress, but the content of the reviews often lacks sufficient detail. Tutor assessors do not set learners targets that are specific and learners are not challenged to produce written work of a high standard.
- Tutor assessors are well qualified and have extensive vocational experience which they use well to assist learners to develop the skills they require to be successful. Regular training for staff ensures that tutor assessors teach the learners the latest techniques within beauty therapy and personal fitness.
- The majority of tutors coach improvements in learners' practical skills in beauty therapy and personal fitness very well. As a result, learners quickly become proficient in meeting

clients' needs within these sectors.

- Tutor assessors plan training and assessments well to minimise disruption to employers' organisations and to meet individual needs. For example, learners who work full time attend lessons on a Sunday. Tutor assessors plan these lessons so that the learners develop the knowledge in the morning and apply it to their practical skills in the afternoon.

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

**Good**

- Learners are motivated, keen to learn and are successful in gaining qualifications so that they can improve their career prospects. In observed sessions, learners attend well.
- Learners improve their confidence and develop their skills well. For example, learners on personal training courses demonstrate how to use equipment safely and then prescribe specific and individualised programmes to meet a client's goals. Learners on beauty therapy courses develop confidence in a range of treatments, including thoracic massage and galvanic facials.
- Learners on beauty therapy courses develop the oral skills that they require to be successful working as practitioners in the sector. For example, they learn the correct pronunciation of challenging subject-specific terminology such as desincrustation and iontophoresis.
- Learners have a good understanding of British values and treat each other and colleagues with respect and tolerance. Learners on beauty therapy courses work well together and learn from each other effectively.
- Learners have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. For example, learners undertake risk assessments when planning activities in an after-school group and before using equipment such as electrolysis machines. Learners in salons carefully check clients' medical conditions and suitability when planning treatments and use the appropriate personal protection equipment.
- All learners complete online courses on radicalisation and extremism and have a good awareness of the possible risks from radicalisation or extremist groups.
- Learners benefit from effective advice and guidance on the relevant career pathways and the opportunities available to them at the start of their training. They speak confidently about the benefits that completing their courses will bring in enabling them to progress in their careers.
- Staff direct learners to a range of organisations to help them progress into their future careers. For example, staff assist learners wishing to set up their own business by referring them to the support available from the Prince's Trust. Staff direct learners who are over 50 years of age to a support scheme operated by a local authority.
- Tutor assessors do not focus sufficiently on improving learners' English skills. As a result, learners continue to make the same mistakes, do not improve their written work and are not prepared well as they could be for the next stage in their career.
- Tutor assessors do not teach learners the mathematical skills they may require in their work well enough. For example, tutor assessors do not develop learners' skills in handling cash, measuring solvent and analysing sales targets well. Tutor assessors do not

consistently correct learners' mathematical errors.

## Outcomes for learners

**Good**

- Learners' pass rates are very high. All learners who completed their programme in 2017/18 achieved their qualifications.
- Learners enjoy their learning. They are motivated, and are keen to learn and gain qualifications so that they can improve their career prospects.
- Learners make good progress developing skills that meet clients' needs. For example, learners on personal fitness training courses demonstrate how to use equipment effectively and safely to clients and can prescribe specific and individualised programmes to meet clients' goals. Learners on beauty courses are developing good skills in using electronic machines to conduct treatments and are effective in undertaking body massages. These beauty therapy learners also develop a good understanding of anatomy and physiology.
- There are no significant gaps in achievement between different groups of learners.
- Learners are well prepared for work and consequently almost all progress directly into employment or self-employment.
- In 2017/18, too many learners left their programmes early. Almost a third dropped out and did not complete their programmes. In the current year, however, very few learners have left early.
- Learners make slow progress in developing their skills in written English and, as a result, the standard of their written work is often not good enough.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	1236951
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	44
Principal/CEO	Mr John Fields
Telephone number	0208 144 5693
Website	<a href="http://www.abacustraininggroup.co.uk">www.abacustraininggroup.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)	-	-	-	-	-	48	-	27
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-	-	-	-	-	-		
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:	None							

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by an external consultant working for the provider, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, and telephone calls 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

Roger Pilgrim, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Fallon Southwell	Ofsted Inspector
Lynne Paxton	Ofsted Inspector

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