



Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate
for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**A4E Wales Ltd
The Warehouse
School Lane
Newport
NP20 1LE**

Date of inspection: January 2014

by

**Estyn, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education
and Training in Wales**

During each inspection, inspectors aim to answer three key questions:

Key Question 1: How good are the outcomes?

Key Question 2: How good is provision?

Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management?

Inspectors also provide an overall judgement on the provider's current performance and on its prospects for improvement.

In these evaluations, inspectors use a four-point scale:

| Judgement | What the judgement means |
|-----------------------|---|
| Excellent | Many strengths, including significant examples of sector-leading practice |
| Good | Many strengths and no important areas requiring significant improvement |
| Adequate | Strengths outweigh areas for improvement |
| Unsatisfactory | Important areas for improvement outweigh strengths |

The report was produced in accordance with section 77 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

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Context

A4e is an international provider of front-line public sector services. It employs about 3,000 people delivering contracts in Australia, India, Europe and the United Kingdom. A4e's head office in Sheffield provides all its central support services: Central support services provide support globally as well as over 200 delivery locations across Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England.

The provider's work-based learning (WBL) provision in Wales is the responsibility of the Director of UK Skills and Education in Sheffield. It has a contract with the Welsh Government to deliver apprenticeships and traineeships across North, Mid, South and West Wales. The provider currently delivers its contract from six locations in Wales: Colwyn Bay in North Wales, Port Talbot and Swansea in South West Wales, Porth and Aberdare in Rhondda Cynon Taff and Newport in South East Wales. There are currently about 1,045 learners on work-based programmes in Wales with around half of learners on traineeships with the remaining half on apprenticeships.

The provider uses four subcontractors: Bethany Training in Mid Wales, Plato and Rossett Training in North Wales and Skill UK in South West Wales. It also delivers Jobs Growth Wales in Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Swansea, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire unitary authorities.

Summary

| | |
|---|-----------------|
| The provider's current performance | Adequate |
| The provider's prospects for improvement | Adequate |

Current performance

The current performance of the provider is adequate because:

- the outcomes for learners on traineeship programmes have improved in 2012 to 2013;
- there is thorough initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy skills;
- learners feel safe and happy in their learning environment;
- there is a wide range of WBL provision that meets the needs of most learners; and
- tutors plan training to meet the needs of individual apprentices well.

However:

- outcomes for learners have been consistently below the national average for the sector over the past three years;
- in too many sessions learners make slow progress;
- learners do not improve their Welsh language skills enough; and
- the quality of teaching, training and assessment is too inconsistent across the provision.

Prospects for improvement

The provider's overall prospects for improvement are judged adequate because:

- leaders and managers have taken effective action to improve outcomes for traineeship learners;
- leaders and managers have a clear vision and strategy for the delivery of its Welsh Government contract;
- working relationships between the assessors and employers are effective;
- there is good communication between A4e Head Office and the provider's senior managers in Wales; and
- the provider manages its sub-contractors well.

However:

- action by leaders and managers has not yet been fully effective in improving outcomes for learners on the apprenticeship programme;
- most centres lack WiFi so learners and tutors have poor access to online learning resources; resources;
- employers and sub-contractors are not well enough involved in the self-assessment processes; and
- not all staff and sub-contractors follow operational practices consistently.

Recommendations

- R1 Improve the rates at which all learners complete their qualifications successfully
- R2 Improve learners' literacy and numeracy skills
- R3 Provide more opportunities for learners to develop their Welsh language skills
- R4 Improve the quality of teaching, training and assessment
- R5 Ensure that all staff and sub-contractors apply its operational procedures consistently across the provision
- R6 Make sure that all tutors and learners have access to online learning resources

What happens next?

Estyn requires the provider to address the recommendations from its inspection in its improvement plan to DfES as part of its regular improvement planning cycle. Estyn will monitor the progress of the provider.

A small team of inspectors will visit the provider to judge progress against the recommendations in the inspection report in around 12 months' time.

Main findings

Key Question 1: How good are outcomes?

Adequate

Standards: Adequate

Since 2009, with the exception of 2011-2012 when outcomes were well below the average for the WBL sector, the success rates for apprenticeship and traineeship learners have been adequate at just below the sector average. However, data for 2012 to 2013 shows considerable improvement in the outcomes on traineeship programmes, which are now good.

Over the last three years there have been a few learners who completed their training frameworks later than planned. However, in the last year nearly all learners who successfully completed their training programmes did so within the planned timescale.

The standards that learners achieve during their training are adequate. The majority of learners make appropriate progress and generally engage with their training well. They respond positively to tutors' and assessors' questions, demonstrating good oral skills. However, in too many sessions, tutors do not set learners sufficiently challenging targets and the pace of their learning is too slow.

All learners undergo a good initial assessment to identify their levels of literacy and numeracy. As a result, the majority of learners achieve their Essential Skills Wales (ESW) qualifications at a satisfactory rate. The majority of learners' numeracy skills are underdeveloped, with opportunities missed in addressing these in learners' main training programmes, particularly in the workplace.

The majority of learners make reasonable progress in improving their writing skills and receive useful feedback from their assessors. However, a minority of learners make too many spelling and grammatical mistakes, which they repeat over time. Very few learners develop their Welsh language skills through their programmes of study. Bilingual learners have the opportunity for assessment through the medium of Welsh but very few take this up.

Wellbeing: Adequate

Most learners are happy and enjoy their learning programmes. They feel safe in their training environments and are confident that the provider would deal with any issues of bullying and harassment quickly and effectively if they arise.

A few learners can explain how to eat and drink healthily well. Learners on child care placements speak confidently about keeping healthy. However, very few learners on other programmes demonstrate an understanding of the impact of broader aspects of wellbeing, such as exercise, on their lifestyles.

Learners from two of the provider's centres have participated well in a national competition run by a charity which provides small grants for 16-24 year olds to run a

project to improve money management skills in their community. This has improved these learners' awareness of the financial difficulties faced by some families in the local community. However, overall, very few learners across the provider are involved in community or charity work.

Many traineeship learners complete introductory qualifications successfully in health and safety and, where relevant, are given the opportunity to achieve relevant sector-specific awards such as those in construction. Other learners achieve units of qualification, which include aspects of wellbeing as part of their core qualifications. In school settings, learners used this knowledge well, incorporating wellbeing topics into classroom displays.

The majority of learners behave well and they have good relationships with peers and staff.

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| Key Question 2: How good is provision? | Adequate |
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Learning experiences: Adequate

Overall, the provider delivers a comprehensive range of WBL programmes that meet the needs of most learners and employers well.

Tutors develop a good early awareness of the longer term aims of apprenticeship learners. They use this knowledge well in planning training to enhance the learners' job aspirations. However, not enough tutors subsequently help learners to develop their career-planning skills for themselves.

Most tutors contextualise and embed essential skills well into learners' training programmes. A minority of learners on traineeship programmes have good opportunities to extend their skills, confidence and personal development through the wider key skills of improving own learning, working with others and problem solving. However, these practices are not used consistently enough across the provider.

The provider makes sure that all learners do an initial diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy. It makes good use of the results to identify individual learners' needs. However, many learners' targets for improving their literacy and numeracy skills are not specific enough. Tutors do not use the provider's recently introduced, useful marking guide for spelling, punctuation and grammar consistently.

The provider is starting to make good progress in developing learners' knowledge and understanding of Welsh culture. However, managers and staff do not promote the benefits of developing the Welsh language well enough.

Useful recycling facilities are available in all of the provider's centres together with good wall displays to encourage learners to think about waste reduction. Many assessors discuss the principles of education for sustainable development and global citizenship (ESDGC) with learners during reviews, but this is often at a superficial level.

Teaching: Adequate

The majority of tutors and assessors have good subject and technical knowledge. Most support learners well and through their effective working relationships with employers, assessors are able to take good advantage of naturally occurring evidence when planning apprentices' assessments.

The majority of tutors plan useful sessions that have clear aims and objectives. Most use a wide range of teaching and training methods including video clips, guided discussion, paper exercises and information technology-based tasks that cater for a broad range of learning styles. A few tutors and assessors develop useful teaching materials, which they customise to individuals' interests or needs. In most group sessions, tutors engage learners well. However, in too many sessions tutors do not challenge learners well enough and the pace of the session is too slow to match learners' needs. In a minority of sessions, tutors do not give enough attention to the varying needs of different groups of learners in their planning and delivery of sessions. A minority of tutors and assessors do not check to see if learners have made progress in their knowledge and understanding.

Many tutors do not plan lessons and assessment plans well enough to systematically raise learners' skills in literacy or numeracy.

In around half of sessions, tutors' assessment of learners' practical skills is good. They record the outcomes of assessment well, and provide learners with constructive written feedback on how to improve the standard of their work.

Most tutors and assessors carry out reviews methodically and they give good attention to reviewing learners' work since the last visit. In a minority of cases, the targets and objectives assessors set with the learner do not focus clearly enough on what the learner needs to learn and do not make enough reference to developing learners' literacy and numeracy skills.

Care, support and guidance: Adequate

The provider has comprehensive induction procedures. This includes a good pre-induction taster programme, which helps learners, particularly those with severe barriers to learning, to decide whether or not to proceed with their training.

Tutors and assessors lead appropriate discussions on health, care and wellbeing well during most classroom sessions and in around half of learner reviews. Tutors and assessors reinforce health and safety effectively during the majority of learners' reviews. The provider's centres have useful sources of information for learners relating to topics such as sexual health and employment opportunities. Centre staff and employers regularly monitor learners' attendance and punctuality well. The provider keeps useful notes against learner names to record any training or learner support needs. However, there is no clear system to record learners' identified needs and co-ordinate the provider's response to these.

The provider has appropriate arrangements in place to support learners with basic skills needs. However, it does not assess the learning support needs of learners with

specific learning difficulties as it does not have qualified staff to do so. Where necessary it refers learners to other appropriate agencies.

While there is good guidance for learners on apprenticeship programmes, the provider does not take enough account of the learners' skills and qualifications when placing them on traineeships.

The provider has an appropriate policy and procedures for safeguarding.

Learning environment: Adequate

The provider ensures that all its centres offer a supportive, caring and welcoming environment for its learners.

At induction, learners receive an effective introduction to equality and diversity policies and practices. However, these are not re-enforced well enough at a majority of learners' reviews. Many assessors also miss opportunities to further develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity at their review.

Overall, the facilities at the provider's centres are fit for purpose. The majority of learners have access to an appropriate range of facilities which meet their needs. There is a good selection of learners' work displayed in most classrooms and throughout the centres. These displays enhance the learning environment and help to promote enrichment activities associated with health and wellbeing and the Welsh culture.

In the majority of centres, learners and tutors have access to an adequate range of learning resources. However, there is no availability of Wi-Fi at any of the provider's centres. As a result, learners and tutors do not have access to on-line teaching and learning materials.

In the majority of cases, the standards of employers' premises are good. They provide appropriate environments for learners to gain work-related skills and to undertake assessments.

There is no access for wheelchair users or learners with restricted mobility at two of the provider's centres. However, the provider has made suitable alternative arrangements for learners with disabilities to access suitable alternative premises where they can undertake their training.

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| Key Question 3: How good are leadership and management? | Adequate |
|--|-----------------|

Leadership: Adequate

A4e's UK Director of Operations, the Wales leader and the Welsh management team provide appropriate leadership for A4e's provision in Wales. The UK Director of Operations and the Wales leader are relatively new to the organisation following a restructure of A4e 18 months ago. Together with A4e's UK Head of Quality, they are currently developing an appropriate vision and strategy for A4e Wales. It is too early to judge the full impact of this on learners' outcomes.

The reporting structure between A4e's UK head office, senior and middle managers in Wales is clear. All managers have well-defined roles and responsibilities. This includes the effective management of its six training centres. In addition, the provider works well with its four sub-contractors that deliver apprenticeships on training routes not delivered directly by the provider.

The Wales-based management group demonstrate an appropriate understanding of what the provider needs to do to secure improvement in the standards that learners achieve and the quality of their training. However, they have yet to set a clear strategy on how they will work towards achieving excellence in training, assessment and outcomes for learners.

The provider now uses its operational and management procedures across its six training centres more consistently. As a result of this, in the period 2012 to 2013, the provider's managers improved learner outcomes successfully on the traineeship programme through ensuring that staff more rigorously followed existing processes to monitor learners' progress and outcomes. This work has not yet had a good enough impact on the apprenticeship programme.

Improving quality: Adequate

The provider carried out a major review of its quality assurance practices recently. This identified that that the provider's staff as well as of sub-contractors were not using the existing procedures to monitor the performance and delivery of training well enough. Since then, the provider has introduced systematic weekly reporting procedures and this has helped to identify any aspects of underperformance at an early enough stage to take effective action. Managers now track learner performance well.

The provider has a detailed and well-established self-assessment process, which covers most aspects of its work. Most managers are involved closely in the process of self-assessment. However, sub-contractors are not involved in the process. The self-assessment report is detailed but is often too descriptive. It overstates the strengths of the provision.

The quality development plan is a detailed document that identifies key aspects where action needs to be taken to improve performance. However, it does not always set clear targets and milestones for monitoring and reviewing progress against targets.

The provider seeks learners' views through learner forums and feedback from learners during reviews. It also uses the Learner Voice survey well and makes good reference to its findings in the self-assessment report.

Overall, the provider has made reasonable progress in addressing the recommendations from the last inspection in 2008.

Partnership working: Adequate

The provider has good working relationships with its sub-contractors. It treats its sub-contractors as partners and is open and transparent in all of its dealings with them. It involves sub-contractors' staff in regular standardisation meetings and provides them with appropriate professional development opportunities. However, sub-contractors are not involved enough in planning and implementing practices to improve opportunities for learners

The provider's current partnership working involves its participation in a few of the 14-19 networks across Wales and its membership of the National Training federation Wales (NTfW). However, the provider has limited involvement in other external partnerships in planning and delivering training. For example, despite its pan-Wales provision the provider has under-developed working relationships with further education institutions, local authorities, other WBL providers and other relevant local and national organisations.

Resource management: Adequate

The provider's staff have the appropriate knowledge, skills and experience to deliver the various programmes to learners. However, it does not have enough staff to provide learners with Welsh language support. The provider deploys its staff well to make the best use of their time and experience. Staff have appropriate workloads to enable them to deliver programmes and to support their learners well.

The provider uses the staff performance management system developed by its head office well and ensures that its sub-contractors have appropriate staff performance management systems.

Overall, all of the provider's centres have resources and equipment that are at least adequate and sometimes good. However, the provider does not have Wi-Fi or full intranet facilities at any of its centres.

The provider's head office finance team have put in place appropriate financial controls for the provider including agreeing a Wales budget to deliver the Welsh Government contract. These arrangements are appropriate to the needs of the provider especially as the provider is also able to call upon the specialist resources of its head office to support its activities in Wales.

The Wales leader has good arrangements in place to devolve individual budgets, including business targets, to each of the centre managers. These form key performance indicators for the measurement of centre managers' performance.

The provider provides adequate education and training for their learners. It provides adequate value for money.

Appendix 1

Learner satisfaction

We use the outcomes of the Welsh Government Learner Voice survey to inform all of our inspections of post 16 education and training. Learner Voice is a learner satisfaction survey conducted by the Welsh Government between January and February 2013.

The survey asks learners a range of questions about the following key themes:

- the information, advice and support provided to them;
- provider responsiveness, learning environment and student wellbeing;
- the quality of teaching and training; and
- overall satisfaction.

Each theme contains a range of questions requiring learners to rate their providers performance. There are 28 questions overall.

Three hundred and forty eight learners completed the survey. This is 33 % of the provider's learner population.

Fifty-three per cent of respondents rated the provider as very good overall. This is seven percentage points lower than the sector average of 60%. A further 36% rated the provider as good overall. Eighty-nine per cent of respondents thought that their course was better than they expected. This is close to the sector average of 90%.

The provider achieved lower scores than the sector average for very good ratings in all but one of the five themes of the survey; health and wellbeing. In relation to the theme on health and wellbeing learners rated the provider to be at the sector average of 45% very good. Between 33% and 40% of respondents felt that the provider is 'good' against the five themes.

The provider achieves scores for 'very good' that are amongst the lowest in the sector across most of the 28 questions in the survey. Overall 87% of respondents considered teaching and training to be 'very good' or 'good'.

The survey also analyses learners' responses by demographic information – gender, age, ethnicity and disability. In general the provider achieves lower 'very good' scores than the sector average across all key demographics for each question. However, learners aged 19-24 and learners from ethnic minority give higher scores than the sector average across most of the questions.

Appendix 2

The inspection team

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|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Bernard O'Reilly | Reporting Inspector |
| Steve Bell | Team Inspector |
| Stephen Davies | Team Inspector |
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| Mark Evans | Team Inspector |
| Alun Connick | Team Inspector |
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