



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru
Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales

A report on

**Associated Community Training Ltd
Ocean Park House
East Tyndall Street
Cardiff
CF24 5GT**

Date of inspection: February 2019

by

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

About Associated Community Training Ltd

Associated Community Training Ltd (ACT) has been a privately owned training provider, based in Cardiff, with a network of partners across Wales. In October 2016, ACT became a wholly owned subsidiary of the Cardiff and Vale College group. It retains its ACT brand, identity and management structure but reports to the governing body of the Cardiff and Vale College group.

ACT and its network has a wide range of provision, including entry level, traineeship at engagement and level 1, foundation apprenticeships, apprenticeships and higher apprenticeship programmes. It has approximately 4,000 apprenticeship and 1,500 traineeship learners on programme. The current Welsh Government contract value is approximately £21.2m.

The provider works with the following partners

British Printing Industries Federation (BPIF)
Call of the Wild
Cardiff City Foundation
Coleg QS
Groundwork Wales
Hyfforddiant Ceredigion Training (HCT)
Icon
Inspire
Llamau
Motivational Preparation College for Training (MPCT)
Portal Training
Talk Training
Tooth Fairies
The Urdd
XR Training
YHF Training

It also currently has small numbers of learners in run-down contracts with the Hair and Beauty Academy and Learn Direct.

The provider and its partners deliver training programmes in:

Health, Public Services and Care
Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care
Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment
Information and Communication Technology
Retailing and Customer Service
Hair and Beauty
Hospitality and Catering
Leisure, Travel and Tourism
Arts, Media & Publishing
Education and Training
Business, Administration and Law

Summary

Most learners on apprenticeship frameworks develop and display sound vocational skills that benefit them in their work. They make useful and relevant connections between the theory they learn and their job roles. Most apprenticeship learners make good progress, although a few make slower progress or complete their frameworks later than expected. Over a three year period, learners on apprenticeship, foundation apprenticeship and higher apprenticeship programmes successfully complete their frameworks at rates around the national averages.

Many learners on traineeship engagement programmes develop relevant skills for learning and employability well. Traineeships show a three-year trend of generally above-average positive progressions.

Many learners improve their confidence, resilience, self-awareness and social skills. At all levels, many improve their attitudes to learning or regain their motivation to study after a break from education.

Nearly all practitioners deliver well planned teaching sessions that develop learners' theory, vocational and life skills well. They have high expectations for their learners regardless of their starting points.

The provider supports learners well, through a range of effective services including attendance and wellbeing officers, a counselling service and in-class learning support.

Senior leaders have established a supportive and positive culture which is understood and shared by colleagues and partners across the provider. The ethos of the organisation is one which promotes the wellbeing of learners and staff well. Leaders respond well to regional and national priorities and are prepared to take on challenging provision and work with new partners to the benefit of learners.

Inspection area	Judgement
Standards	Good
Wellbeing and attitudes to learning	Good
Teaching and learning experiences	Good
Care, support and guidance	Good
Leadership and management	Good

Recommendations

- R1 Identify and evaluate support for learners who require additional support more effectively
- R2 Increase learners' use of the Welsh language as a workplace skill
- R3 Improve opportunities for learners on traineeship programmes to undertake appropriate work placement experience
- R4 Refine self-evaluation and improvement planning to more accurately reflect and address variability in performance across partners

What happens next

Not in follow-up

The provider will draw up an action plan to address the recommendations from the inspection.

Main findings

Standards: Good

Most learners on apprenticeship frameworks develop and display sound vocational skills that benefit them in their job roles. They make useful and relevant connections between the theory they learn and their job roles, through discussions with their assessors, research tasks and in off-the-job sessions. For example, a level 3 apprentice working in supported housing for young people describes how attachment theory explains the behaviour of one of the young people in her care. A level 4 management apprentice working in the NHS uses digital tools well to help her manage her workload more effectively. Level 2 apprentices training to work as gym instructors recognise different body types and how this will affect the training plans they need to prepare for their clients.

Many apprenticeship learners are clear about their progress and use relevant targets to focus their efforts to improve their work well. A few use mobile phone applications to upload assessed work, receive feedback from their assessor and keep up-to-date with their work. However, a few make slower progress or complete their frameworks later than expected.

Learners on traineeships enter their programmes from a wide range of starting points, often with significant barriers to learning. Many learners on traineeship engagement programmes overcome these barriers and develop relevant skills for learning and employability such as team working, using hand tools and preparing a CV.

Many learners on traineeship level 1 programmes develop introductory vocational skills related to their chosen area well. For example, childcare learners plan engaging activities for nursery children related to Chinese New Year, IT learners develop accurate spreadsheets and media applications, and learners preparing to enter the military and public services improve their physical fitness and leadership capacity well. While most learners on traineeship programmes sample experiences from a range of vocational areas before choosing a route to progress on to, only around half carry out realistic work placements as part of their programmes.

Nearly all learners complete the Wales essential skills toolkit (WEST) initial literacy and numeracy assessment at the start of their programme. Many are aware of what they need to do to improve and make good use of WEST resources to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Most learners present their work well, with spelling, punctuation and grammar appropriate to their level of programme. Most learners show an improvement in the quality of their writing as their programmes continue. A minority of learners on level 2 apprenticeships complete essential skills Wales qualifications at levels higher than their framework requirements. However, only a very few learners on level 3 frameworks achieve essential skills at a higher level.

The majority of learners across the provision have sound digital skills and use a range of digital tools effectively as part of their studies and their work. For example, learners on traineeship programmes collaborate well on-line to create shared project work.

The provider has a small but growing proportion of Welsh speaking learners. Of these, around a third complete some aspects of their qualification through the medium of Welsh or bilingually. Many of these learners develop their use of Welsh in the work places effectively. For example, a level 3 apprentice coaching sports to young people in a Welsh medium setting develops his confidence, technical vocabulary and use of written Welsh well. However, learners who are Welsh speakers do not use their Welsh in workplace and training settings enough. Overall, too few learners develop Welsh as a workplace skill.

The most recent published data for 2017-2018 show that learners achieve their foundation apprenticeship frameworks at a rate three percentage points below the national average, apprenticeships at a rate two percentage points below, and higher apprenticeships at a rate equal to the national average. Three-year trends at all three levels show a pattern of success rates close to the national averages. Across the provider's network, a few partners have consistently strong success rates. However, in a few routes, and in a few partners, trends in learners' success rates show inconsistent improvement and are below the national averages.

The most recent published data show that learners on traineeships progress on to higher level learning or employment well, and at rates slightly above the national averages. This reflects a three-year trend of generally above-average positive progressions for learners on both traineeship engagement and traineeship level 1 programmes.

Wellbeing and attitudes to learning: Good

Many learners, including those who start from a very low base, improve their confidence, resilience, self-awareness and social skills. At all levels, many improve their attitudes to learning or regain their motivation to study after a break from education. They develop confidence in their vocational ability which helps them to find work or seek promotion, or to improve their performance and feel more in control of their work in their current role.

Many apprenticeship learners become reflective independent learners who are able to continue their learning outside of their training programmes. A motor vehicle apprentice enjoys his work, stripping down a gear box. He downloads plans and instructions from the internet himself. He has pride in his work, takes care of his tools and perseveres despite setbacks.

Many learners relate well to their tutors. In classroom sessions, they collaborate well to support each other in their learning. They respond well to questions and to group discussions, although in a very few classes, a few learners do not contribute enough.

Many traineeship learners who have severe barriers to learning such as mental health problems, additional learning needs and unsettled home lives are attentive in class and participate well. These learners proudly describe the work they have done, for example, designing a poster on IT safety or mate crime. Many traineeship learners increase their understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work, and how to look after the money they earn.

Many learners take part in relevant community projects and charitable activities and understand the benefits of doing so, both to themselves and their communities. Most activities are helpful to the learners' vocational pathways, such as hair and beauty sessions in a care home, but also, through activities such as volunteering with food banks, working with the homeless, and litter-picking, learners understand environmental sustainability and develop social awareness.

Nearly all learners feel safe both in the classroom and in their workplace. They feel cared-for and know who to contact if they need to raise concerns. Most improve their understanding of citizenship and equality and diversity. They understand what they need to do to stay safe online and are aware of the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Most learners use a range of innovative online resources developed by the provider to improve their wellbeing and are aware of how to report any concerns discretely.

Many learners make healthy choices about diet and physical wellbeing, particularly in the traineeship programme and especially in pathways such as sport, military preparation, and health and beauty.

In traineeships most learners attend classroom, work placement and taster sessions regularly. However, in a few classes, a minority of learners do not attend regularly enough or do not sustain their attendance throughout the day.

Teaching and learning experiences: Good

Nearly all practitioners deliver well planned teaching sessions that develop learners' theory, vocational and life skills well. Most practitioners have suitable up-to-date subject and vocational knowledge. They are highly skilled in supporting learners to make progress in both practical and theory sessions. For example, practitioners on a level 2 sport anatomy and physiology programme plan for learners to recreate the structure of a skeleton using spaghetti. As a result, learners quickly master the names of the bones and how they articulate.

Most practitioners question learners effectively, for example, to gauge understanding and to stretch and develop learners' thinking. However, in a very few cases, practitioners allow one or two learners to dominate discussion and question and answer sessions which prevents other learners from contributing.

Most practitioners who deliver the traineeship engagement programme adapt their teaching well to meet the needs of learners. For example, during military preparation taught sessions practitioners plan a good balance of theory and practical outdoor activities to ensure all learners maintain their interest and concentration. In motor vehicle, a tutor consolidates a theory session well by planning for learners to put in practice what they have learnt through working together in small groups, finding faults and stripping down car engines.

Most practitioners who deliver the apprenticeship programme develop learners' higher level vocational skills well. For example, practitioners on the level 4 business management programme plan useful opportunities for learners to develop a valuable range of high level digital marketing skills.

Nearly all practitioners have a good rapport with their learners. They understand each learner's individual needs and personal circumstances well and make good use of this when planning taught sessions. Nearly all practitioners have high expectations for their learners regardless of their starting points.

Nearly all assessors carry out regular and purposeful progress reviews with their learners to identify short-term targets and goals. However, in a very few cases, targets are too generic and learners are unclear as to what they need to do. Most practitioners track and monitor learners' progress effectively using the provider's electronic system. However, in a very few cases, when carrying out progress reviews, assessors do not involve employers well enough which means that they are not fully appraised of their employees' progress.

The provider has well established and strong relationships with a wide range of employers and delivers a wide range of training programmes and learning experiences that are well matched to learners' aspirations and employers' needs. The provider offers a wide range of vocational pathways such as digital marketing, health and social care, social media for business and professional cookery. On most training programmes learners participate in realistic or simulated work experiences. However, on the traineeship level 1 programme only around half of learners benefit from actual work placement experience.

Most practitioners use WEST assessments effectively to identify learners' strengths and the areas they need to improve in literacy, numeracy and digital skills. However, in a very few cases, practitioners do not give learners sufficient feedback on what they need to do to improve their literacy or numeracy, and as a result they do not know what they need to do to improve.

The provider has recognised the need to increase the awareness of Welsh language as an employability skill and has recently appointed a full time Welsh development officer. The Welsh development officer has created a helpful range of attractive and useful bilingual resources which practitioners are beginning to use to use in classroom, in reviews and in the workplace. However, too few learners currently undertake assessments through the medium of Welsh or improve their use of Welsh as a workplace skill well enough.

Care, support and guidance: Good

The provider's attendance and wellbeing officers provide timely and useful support to learners who are at risk of disengaging. They are effective in helping these learners develop their resilience, and provide both direct personal support and access to dedicated support services where appropriate. The provider's additional learning needs panel of specialist staff carefully considers the needs of referred learners who face significant barriers to learning. The panel ensures that these learners access valuable tailored support. For example, the counselling service provides worthwhile support to learners experiencing anxiety and mental health problems. The provider works well with a range of external agencies to support learners who face personal, financial, domestic and health challenges.

The provider's arrangements for identifying learners who require additional support for learning are suitable. However, the monitoring of progress for these groups,

including more able and talented learners, is underdeveloped. This limits the provider's ability to identify and evaluate the effectiveness of support for these groups of learners.

The provider's network promotes healthy lifestyles effectively using a range of activities and resources. Healthy eating options are available to learners across the learning centres. Staff provide beneficial support for the personal development of learners. For example, they help develop learners' confidence and their ability to protect themselves against bullying or harassment. Learners take part in worthwhile discussions on radicalisation and extremism. The opportunities team support traineeship learners to develop their employability skills well. With the support of their tutors, a few learners successfully take part in valuable regional and national vocational skills competitions.

The provider's 'Respect' programme is effective in developing learners' appreciation of equality and diversity. The programme successfully encourages learners to develop empathy and to challenge stereotypes. Learners also have opportunities to attend the celebrations of culture, for example, the recent Chinese new year celebrations. The provider arranges useful opportunities for learners to take part in community and fundraising activities. For example, traineeship learners interview local business owners to understand the ways in which they interact with their communities. The provider has effective practices in place to advise prospective learners of the learning pathways and opportunities available to them.

The provider's arrangements for safeguarding its learners and for protecting them against radicalisation and extremism are appropriate and give no cause for concern.

Leadership and management: Good

Senior leaders have established a supportive and positive culture, which is understood and shared by colleagues and partners across the provider. Leaders at all levels adopt valuable coaching approaches to raise the performance of staff. As a result, the ethos of the organisation is one that promotes the wellbeing of learners and staff well.

Leaders respond well to regional and national priorities, for example by delivering significant growth in higher apprenticeship and apprenticeship delivery in Welsh Government priority areas, or by developing new apprenticeships in digital learning design and digital application support. They are prepared to take on challenging provision and work with new partners for the benefit of learners. This is beginning to have a positive impact on outcomes for learners from the most disadvantaged groups, such as charities supporting homeless young people, or for otherwise underdeveloped provision, for example, through a developing partnership with a provider offering Welsh medium training.

As a wholly owned subsidiary of Cardiff and Vale College, college governors contribute appropriately to the development of ACT through membership of its strategic advisory board. The provider has relevant strategic priorities in quality, efficiency, growth and happiness. These align well to those of the college and have been developed collaboratively between senior leaders, partners, the strategic advisory board, and in consultation with employees through the active staff council.

The provider has developed a monitoring and reporting system which partners use well to drill down and analyse trends and benchmark performance against each other and ACT. ACT sets aspirational targets for achievement and learners achieve at rates around national averages. However, there is not a clear consistent improving trend in framework success rates in foundation apprenticeships in a minority of routes and partners.

ACT uses a broad range of quality improvement strategies appropriately. These include learner and employer voice surveys, quality audits, due diligence checks, teaching and learning observations, best practice groups, thematic reviews and face-to-face quality meetings with partners across the network.

Self-evaluation processes make thorough use of data to analyse trends and inform improvement planning. Senior leaders, partners and governors each play a useful role in self-evaluation and moderation processes. Partner quality managers provide effective support to help partners self-evaluate their provision and undertake observations. However, the provider's overarching self-evaluation and improvement planning is too heavily based on the performance of a few large providers and does not fully reflect the variability in performance across its many other partners.

ACT uses performance reviews of staff, combined with information from quality process effectively to plan a range of relevant professional development activities which is made available to staff in ACT and partners. This includes useful leadership training for managers at ACT, as part of a programme to developing a coaching style of leadership at the organisation.

The provider monitors financial performance and contract compliance well. Leaders invest appropriately to support a range of developments including: refurbishment of learning centres in Cardiff and Caerphilly, funding a staff volunteering scheme and investment in digital infrastructure. The provider uses contract reviews well to allocate additional funding to partners who have a track record in achieving high quality and efficient delivery.

Copies of the report

Copies of this report are available from the provider and from the Estyn website (www.estyn.gov.wales)

Estyn evaluates a provider's effectiveness using a four-point judgement scale:

Excellent	Very strong, sustained performance and practice
Good	Strong features, although minor aspects may require improvement
Adequate and needs improvement	Strengths outweigh weaknesses, but important aspects require improvement
Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement	Important weaknesses outweigh strengths

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

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