

Akona Limited

Address: Suit 4, Ikon Business Centre, Tudor Road, Manor Park, Runcorn, WA7 1TA

Unique reference number (URN): 2748156

Inspection report: 10 February 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	●
Expected standard	● ● ● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

✓ Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, learners are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect providers for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The provider has an open and positive culture of safeguarding.
- Not met: The provider has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

1. Inclusion, and leadership and governance

Expected standard	● ●
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Expected standard

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders and staff start to assess and establish learners' individual support needs prior to their recruitment through effective links with employers, job centres and probation services. They gain a detailed understanding of learners' support needs through the thorough enrolment and induction process.

Leaders and staff have established a culture where learners who are experiencing often multiple barriers to learning and employment due to disadvantaged circumstances are welcomed into learning. Leaders ensure that learners are provided with the support they need to overcome the barriers they face in order to fulfil their potential. Leaders monitor the effectiveness of adaptations they make and support they provide to assure themselves that learners gain the knowledge, skills and qualifications they need to progress into work in the rail industry.

Staff have had training and are aware of the need to assess the impact of the support they provide and to take a graduated approach, and they reduce this if needed and possible. Given the short duration of courses, most learners who require support do so for the full 2-week duration.

Leaders ensure that learning takes place in well-resourced, inclusive industry-standard training environments that enable all learners to thrive.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leaders establish an accurate understanding about the quality of the curriculum through their use of effective quality assurance processes. Leaders understand the strengths of the provision and accurately identify improvement priorities, acting swiftly to address these. For example, they rightly recognise that they need to reduce the number of learners that leave the basic course early.

Leaders have established an ambitious strategy, ensuring that the curriculum meets the needs of rail infrastructure employers and provides adults with training and industry-mandated qualifications that enable them to develop in their careers in overhead electric line installation. Leaders have established highly effective partnerships with industry stakeholders. They use these to make well-informed curriculum changes and to access high-value training resources that enhance learners' experiences.

Company owners responsible for governance provide day-to-day leadership for the entire team of staff. They ensure that all leaders and staff are held to account effectively. They take actions necessary to provide high-quality training. Leaders take good account while doing this of staff wellbeing and workloads.

Leaders ensure that the content of the curriculum continually evolves to meet industry developments. The managing director also owns Akona Concepts, which has multiple contracts with primary rail infrastructure providers, such as Balfour Beatty. Leaders plan courses to coincide with upcoming employment opportunities for learners.

Leaders ensure that staff participate in effective training to support them in their role. Industry-specific training ensures that they maintain currency. Leaders also provide well-planned training and support for staff to improve their teaching techniques.

2. Adult learning programmes

Strong standard	
Expected standard	

Strong standard

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard

Leaders have an expert and accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum. They design a highly ambitious and coherent programme that builds from the core principles of overhead electric line construction, as required by Network Rail, to advanced and highly specialised technical content, including isolation and switching systems and installing the latest tensioning equipment used in the industry.

Leaders enhance the curriculum through carefully selected additional content and qualifications, such as health and safety, working at height and manual handling. They review and refine the curriculum regularly to reflect current industrial developments and the growing employment opportunities in railway overhead line electrification. The curriculum equips learners very well for their careers.

Trainers plan and deliver a very well-sequenced curriculum. Learners learn theoretical knowledge in well-equipped classrooms, then apply this in exceptionally well-resourced workshops before operating equipment in realistic rail environments. Workshops include multiple track types, cantilever and tensioning systems, and realistic platforms for working at height. These high-quality resources allow learners to practise repeatedly in conditions that closely mirror live railway settings.

Trainers teach with clarity and precision. They draw on substantial industry experience to explain complex electrical principles and safety-critical procedures in accessible ways. They build in deliberate repetition of key processes, frequent recap and targeted questioning to support learners’ understanding and long-term retention of safety-critical information. Trainers check learning continuously, correct misconceptions swiftly and re-teach where necessary. They use assessment purposefully to confirm that learners apply both theoretical knowledge and practical skills accurately and safely.

Expected standard

Achievement

Expected standard

Most learners achieve the industry-regulated qualifications required to work in railway electrification. However, around a fifth of learners leave early because they decide that the sector is not the right career path for them. Those who remain complete the required qualifications within planned timescales.

Learners make secure progress from their starting points. They develop substantial technical knowledge and practical competence, including safe working, accurate measurement and installation of circuit components, and confident use of precise industry terminology. They develop relevant mathematical, English and digital skills. Learners who are disadvantaged achieve as well as others. Learners' written and practical work are at least of the expected standard.

Most learners go on to positive destinations aligned to their career goals. Learners who complete the basic course typically secure roles as overhead electrified line operatives, often with the provider's commercial partner. Learners taking the advanced course gain increased responsibilities with their existing employer.

Participation and development

Expected standard

Leaders create safe, respectful environments where learners feel welcome, attend well and behave professionally. Staff set clear expectations. Learners know how to raise concerns and understand how to stay safe from risks such as harmful online influences and extremist ideologies. They know how to report any concerns and trust staff to act appropriately.

Leaders and staff provide helpful guidance to support learners' wider development and wellbeing. They prepare learners for the demands of working in the rail industry, including maintaining fitness and meeting strict requirements relating to alcohol and drugs. Staff help learners develop broader employability skills, such as financial awareness and leadership. They link legislation, including the Health and Safety at Work Act, to fundamental British values such as the rule of law, helping learners understand the legal framework that underpins safe and fair employment in the UK. Leaders recognise they could do more to develop other aspects of teaching about British values to the same high standard.

Leaders and staff provide effective, individualised careers guidance. They use their industry expertise and employer networks to give practical advice, support CV development and offer realistic insight into working patterns. Learners make informed decisions about their next steps into employment.

What it's like to be a learner and/or an apprentice at this provider

Learners achieve well and make progress from their starting points on the intensive 2-week Skills Bootcamps. They acquire and apply new technical knowledge and skills that prepare them well for safety-critical roles in overhead line electrification.

Learners gain in confidence through their work and study. They use technical terminology accurately and demonstrate assurance when discussing safety-critical procedures. Learners feel better prepared for promotion or for entering the rail industry for the first time.

Leaders actively recruit adults to the basic level course who are unemployed or have previous criminal convictions. Through participating in the courses, most learners make sustained progress in overcoming barriers to learning and work.

Staff identify learners' starting points carefully and provide appropriate support so that learners can keep up with the pace of the course. Practical steps, such as providing time and space for prayer and fostering a respectful culture, ensure that learners from different backgrounds feel welcome.

Learners welcome that staff treat them fairly. They are confident that staff would address any discrimination or inappropriate behaviour.

Learners develop their understanding of topics beyond the technical requirements of their qualification. They learn about their rights and responsibilities under UK law, including how health and safety legislation protects workers in the rail industry. They discuss the importance of respect, equality and professional conduct in diverse workplaces. They also receive guidance on maintaining physical health for shift work, managing lifestyle risks such as drugs and alcohol in safety-critical roles, and understanding pay and taxation.

Learners are highly satisfied with their training. They value Akona's strong employer links and realistic careers guidance, including support with preparing CVs and job applications. Their motivation is evident in high attendance and professional conduct. Most leave ready for sustained employment and increased responsibility within the overhead line electrification construction sector.

Next steps

- Leaders should further improve the proportion of learners who remain on the course and achieve.
 - Leaders should further improve the extent to which the curriculum provides opportunities to thoroughly embed content that raises learners' awareness about British values, respect for protected characteristics and cultural diversity.
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About this inspection

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with Akona Limited leaders and trainers, learners and learners' employers.

Akona Limited is based in Runcorn. It provides overhead line electrification construction training for adults already working in, or seeking to obtain work in, the overhead electric line construction sector of the rail industry.

Akona Limited provides full cost training to employers in the rail sector. They also have a contract, funded by the Department for Education and commissioned through Enterprise Cheshire and Warrington, to deliver Skills Bootcamps in overhead line electrification construction. The basic overhead line electrification construction course provides training and a pathway for new entrants to the industry to work at a basic level. The advanced overhead line electrification construction course provides opportunities for basic level employees already working in the industry to upskill and take on a wider range of responsibilities. At the time of the inspection, there were 7 learners enrolled on the advanced Skills Bootcamp. Akona Limited does not use any subcontractors.

Joint Managing Directors: Steve Ashley and Gaynor Ashley

Lead inspector:

Malcolm Fraser, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Rebecca Clare, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 10 February 2026

Number of learners

Total learners

7

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other providers can learn from it.

Strong standard

The provider reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The provider is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The provider needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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