

# Action for Employment Limited

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**Inspection date**

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301005

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## Background information

### Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

#### Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

### Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report ([www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Health, public services and care
- Engineering and manufacturing technologies
- Construction, planning and the built environment
- Preparation for life and work
- Business, administration and law

## Description of the provider

1. Action for Employment Limited (A4e) is a national training provider specialising in public and private sector training. It has a number of business strands including A4e Work, A4e Consult, A4e Fund, A4e Educate and A4e Skills. This inspection focuses on the work of A4e Fund and A4e Skills. A4e's mission statement is '*improving people's lives*'.
2. A4e has offices in England, Scotland, Wales, France, Germany, Poland, Israel and Northern Ireland. Its head office in Sheffield provides human resources, training, information technology, finance, administrative and quality assurance support to other offices. The A4e group employs over 2,000 people.
3. A4e Fund manages contracts on behalf of other organisations. It currently manages contracts on behalf of the LSC, Regional Development Agencies and The Home Office. A4e Skills was formed in April 2005 to directly deliver government funded vocational training programmes. Most A4e Fund support staff are based in Sheffield as is the team which manages the Invest in Skills programme delivered on behalf of the South Yorkshire LSC, and the Train to Gain programmes delivered on behalf of the North East, East and West Midlands, London and the South West LSC's.
4. A4e Skills and A4e Fund currently have around 2,087 learners, of whom 334 are apprentices, 63 are on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes and 1,691 are on Train to Gain programmes.
5. A4e provides training across most sector subject areas. The inspection focussed on the apprenticeship, Train to Gain and E2E programmes within business administration and law, health, care and public services, engineering, construction and preparation for life and work.
6. A4e Skills holds direct apprenticeship contracts in four LSC's and delivers all its apprenticeship training itself. A4e Fund holds five Train to Gain regional contracts. A4e's Train to Gain and E2E contracts are delivered by 23 subcontracting partner organisations, 16 of whom do not have LSC or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contracts. This inspection focused on the work of these organisations and the work of A4e.

## Subcontractors visited

<b>Subcontractors</b>	<b>Visited on inspection</b>
C&G Assessment & Training Ltd	*
ClickHere Ltd	*
DPP – Develop-U	*
Essential Training Services	*
Inspire Training	*
GAP Training	*
ProSkills	*
Right Track Training Solutions Ltd	*
Tilad	*
Achieve Through Learning (ATL)	
Broadway Training	
CSV Tene Northumberland	
Lagat	
Manufacturing Excellence Ltd	
Profit From Training Partnership	
Training Options UK Ltd	
Capital Training (SW) Limited	
Construction Learning World	
CSM Consulting Ltd	
IMS (UK) Ltd	
Matrix Training & Development	
QGS Synergy	
Training Exchange	

## Summary of grades awarded

<b>Effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Achievement and standards</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Quality of provision</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Equality of opportunity</b>	<b>Contributory Grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Sector subject area

<b>Health, public services and care</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Engineering and manufacturing technologies</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Construction, planning and the built environment</b>	<b>Good: Grade 2</b>
<b>Preparation for life and work</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>
<b>Business, administration and law</b>	<b>Satisfactory: Grade 3</b>

## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Apprenticeship success rates have improved on nearly all programmes in each of the three years to 2005-06 and are broadly satisfactory at all levels. Train to Gain success rates are satisfactory and have averaged at 85% across most programmes for the last three years. E2E progression rates have been historically low but have improved to a satisfactory 56% in 2006-07. Learners make satisfactory progress relative to their previous achievements. They develop good social and workplace skills.
8. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The most effective learning sessions are well planned and structured to meet learners' needs. The less effective sessions are poorly organised, and the training and learning is not recorded. Resources for learning and assessments are generally satisfactory. The quality of learners' progress reviews and of target-setting is inadequate on most programmes.
9. A4e provides a satisfactory range of programmes which is responsive to the needs of learners and employers. The good range of programmes provides most learners with appropriate progression routes. Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes promote good skills development. However, there are few opportunities for Train to Gain learners to progress to level 3, and insufficient work experience on the E2E programme.
10. Support arrangements for learners are good. Literacy, language and numeracy support is available and effective for those who need it. Training and assessment programmes are generally flexible and matched to meet employer and learner needs. Tutors, employers and assessors provide effective individual support. Career information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.
11. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Links with employers are productive and communications with all partners are good. Training and development for staff is linked to key organisational priorities. Senior managers provide good leadership and have set a clear strategic direction for the company. Improvements have been made in the quality of provision and learner success rates. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Many quality improvements are new and not yet established, however, arrangements are satisfactory overall.

#### Capacity to improve

#### Good: Grade 2

12. A4e has demonstrated that it has good capacity to improve. A4e Skills and Fund have only been a distinct business entity within A4e for approximately three years. During this period, overall success rates across nearly all sector subject areas and across all types of programme have improved each year. The current in-year data shows further continued improvement. Recent management changes are effective in creating a good basis for further improvements in the quality of the provision. Newly developed quality assurance and improvement arrangements include the observation of key processes and detailed quality monitoring for A4e's subcontractors. Good systems collect feedback

from all the key stakeholders; these contribute to the formation of actions for improvement.

13. Managers identify and support staff development needs. Regular in-house training also takes place. Key performance indicators provide all staff with clear targets which are monitored in regular one-to-one meetings with managers.
14. Self-assessment is a fully inclusive process involving all staff, partners and subcontractors. The self-assessment report is largely accurate although inspectors identified that some sections of the report were not sufficiently evaluative.

## Key strengths

- Good trend of success rate improvement across all areas
- Good skills development for Train To gain learners
- Particularly effective engineering programmes to improve business performance
- Good development of learner confidence and social skills
- Good management of organisational growth and development

## Key areas for improvement

- Slow achievement of qualifications
- Quality of teaching and learning
- Poor reviews of learners' progress
- Insufficiently well planned E2E learning programme
- Insufficient equality-related targets for widening participation
- Insufficient off-the-job training for apprentices
- Inconsistent application of new quality improvement processes



## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

15. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Apprenticeship success rates have improved on nearly all programmes in each of the three years to 2005-06 and are broadly satisfactory at all levels. However, the timely completion rate for apprentices and the rate at which many Train to Gain learners achieve their qualification is slow. Train to Gain success rates have averaged around a satisfactory 85% across most programmes for the last three years and are particularly high in engineering. E2E progression rates have been historically low but have improved to a satisfactory 56% in 2006-07. Learners make satisfactory progress relative to their previous achievements. There is a significant regional variation in construction success rates and E2E progression rates. Learners develop good social and workplace skills.

### Quality of provision

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

16. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The better learning sessions are well planned, interesting and carefully structured to meet learner's individual needs. The less effective sessions lack structure, and the training and learning is not well recorded. Resources for learning and assessments are generally satisfactory or better in all areas. Assessment is satisfactory. Procedures for initial assessment are systematic and effectively identify learners who may need support. The quality of learners' progress reviews and target-setting is inadequate on most programmes.
17. A4e provides a satisfactory range of programmes which is responsive to the needs of most learners and particularly responsive in meeting employers' needs. The range of programmes available provides most learners who have few or no qualifications with appropriate progression routes. Train to Gain and apprenticeship programmes promote good skills development and prepare learners well for employment. However, there are few opportunities for Train to Gain learners to progress to level 3 and insufficient work experience and vocational preparedness on the E2E programme.
18. Support arrangements for learners are good. Literacy, numeracy and language support is available and effective for those who need and receive it. Training and assessment programmes are generally flexible and matched to meet employer and learner needs. Tutors and assessors provide effective individual pastoral and academic support. Employers are keen to support learning through time off for study and structured on-the-job training. Career information, advice and guidance are satisfactory.

### Leadership and management

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

#### Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

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19. Managers at all levels of the organisation provide good direction and support to improve the quality of the provision. A4e Skills and Fund divisions are separate business units created just over two years ago. A4e have successfully met their two key strategies which are to improve qualification success rates and to develop and grow the business. The good communication processes include regular update news sheets as well as a useful and informative company magazine. All members of staff contribute to regular one-to-one meetings up to and including reports to the group chief executive officer and the A4e board of directors. Managers effectively focus on developing policies and procedures related to improving all of the key stages in the learner journey including recruitment and selection through to qualification completion and progression.
  20. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. A4e treats its learners with respect, sensitivity and care irrespective of their background. A4e and their subcontractors generally respond quickly in meeting individual learner needs and addressing their barriers to learning. A4e has a broad range of equality and diversity policies and procedures. However, these arrangements are not sufficiently relevant to learners' needs. The policies refer almost exclusively to the needs of A4e staff.
  21. A4e provides its staff with equal opportunities training and promotes further awareness of equality through its subcontractor review arrangements and through learner reviews and induction. A4e provide a useful and informative booklet for every learner which is used well by staff at induction to inform and reinforce respect for others. A4e adequately monitor employers' internal equality arrangements and routinely discusses equality matters with learners and subcontractors. A4e is effective in meeting the business and skill needs of employers. It adequately monitors participation in learning by people from different backgrounds. However, A4e fail to monitor the performance of different types of learner. A4e has insufficient equality-related targets for widening participation through positive actions.
  22. Quality assurance overall is satisfactory. A range of good quality assurance policies and procedures support each stage in the learner journey including a detailed internal audit compliance system, quality-monitoring visits to subcontractors, an internal inspection of A4e's own training programmes and a system of observation of all staff carrying out all key activities. These systems are new and have not yet completed a full cycle. The application of some of these new arrangements across A4e offices and in some sector subject areas is inconsistent. In one sector subject area, there are too few internal verifiers to meet learners assessment needs. More generally, there is insufficient monitoring to ensure the completion of the actions identified during A4e's own internal inspections.
  23. The management of health and safety is good. A dedicated team review the health and safety arrangements across all aspects of A4e's work. Policies and procedures cover all the main activities and internal inspections produce detailed reports to senior managers for review and action. There is a strong emphasis through all A4e's health and safety arrangements on ensuring a safe and secure environment for learners and staff. Staff are well trained in the skills needed to make detailed health and safety checks in the workplace.
  24. Relationships with external organisations, employers and other subcontractors are very productive. The management of the current consortium of 23 subcontractors delivering

the Train to Gain programme is good. A range of network activities and meetings provides an effective system to support and share practices across the partnership. Employers are very satisfied with the quality of training provided by A4e and their subcontractors. Overall, staff, resources and equipment to support the training activity are satisfactory as is the oversight of the provision by the A4e board of directors.

25. Arrangements to provide the additional learning support needs for language, literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. A4e and its subcontracting partners use a range of diagnostic assessment tests to identify additional learning support needs. In most cases, the relevant support is provided. Information, advice and guidance are also satisfactory.

## What learners like:

- Flexible helpful assessors
- 'The chance to work and get qualified at the same time'
- One to one training sessions
- 'Improved skills at work'
- 'A chance to get the qualification I did not get at school'
- 'Massive support'
- 'I am very happy with what A4e have done for me'
- 'Being valued'

## What learners think could improve:

- More opportunities to attend a training session
- 'More time to do the national vocational qualification'
- 'It would be great if my manager got more involved'
- 'I don't think I get enough help, I am disappointed'
- 'My assessment seemed really unorganised'
- 'I need a work placement'

## Sector subject areas

### Health, public services and care

#### Satisfactory: Grade 3

##### Context

26. A4e has 110 advanced apprentices and 101 apprentices based in three regional centres following programmes in early years and social care. All apprenticeship training and assessment is undertaken by A4e staff. Currently 45 apprentices are from minority ethnic groups and 41 are male. In addition A4e has 382 learners on National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) only programmes funded through Train to Gain. A4e deliver some Train to Gain provision but most training and assessment is delivered by four subcontractors. All training and assessment takes place on employers' premises.

##### Strengths

- Effective actions to improve success rates for apprentices
- Good development of skills for train to gain learners

##### Areas for improvement

- Some poor assessment practice
- Poor progress reviews
- Weak literacy and numeracy support for apprentices

##### Achievement and standards

27. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. A4e have implemented a range of successful actions to improve apprenticeship success rates. The most successful of these actions include an overall focus on each stage of the learner journey and a monthly one to one meeting between operational managers and assessors to help identify issues and agree actions to improve provision. From a very poor rate three years ago apprenticeship success rates have improved year on year, increasing from around 12% in 2004-05 for all apprenticeship programmes to a satisfactory 68% for apprentices and 46% for advanced apprentices in 2006-07. Train to Gain success rates are currently 79% and satisfactory having averaged 84% over the last three years.
28. Train to Gain learners develop good personal skills while improving their vocational knowledge and developing their care practice skills. Many learners who have not studied for a number of years or previously gained any relevant vocational qualifications now have good vocational skills and more confidence. A number have gained promotion or taken on additional responsibilities.
29. Apprentices' progress is slow but improving. Approximately 25% of all care apprentices exceed their planned qualification completion date. The frequency of assessment visits for apprentices has been very poor. However, A4e have recruited a number of new assessors and learners are now making better progress. There are too

few training sessions for apprentices to support knowledge evidence requirements. Most Train to Gain learners achieve in a timely manner.

### **Quality of provision**

30. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Personal and vocational support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors provide learners with support on demand and frequently visit learners at work at a time to best meet their needs. Initial advice and guidance is satisfactory as is induction. Learners have good access to a satisfactory range of resources. Employers are fully involved in the Train to Gain programme. For apprentices, progression from level 2 to 3 is encouraged and many learners take this opportunity.
31. There are regional variations in the standards of assessment practice. The most effective assessments are well planned and flexible with the learners' support needs and employers' work patterns carefully considered. The less effective assessments are insufficiently detailed and lack learner or employer input. In some portfolios the range of assessment methods are too narrow. Internal verification arrangements for apprentices are generally poor and do not always identify weaknesses in assessment.
32. Some progress reviews are clear and targets are carefully discussed and agreed with employers and learners. However, too many progress reviews lack any set targets or a thorough review of any previously set improvement targets. Employers are not always meaningfully involved in reviews. Individual learning plans are often not updated as learners progress or their circumstances change.
33. Literacy and numeracy support arrangements for apprentices are weak. All learners have an initial assessment for literacy and numeracy but the results of these assessments are not always shared with learners or recorded on their learning plans. Assessors give good individual support to learners and often provide learners with vocationally relevant learning support materials. However, the support materials are often inappropriate for the less able learner. Train to Gain learners are referred to outside agencies for extra support if needed.

### **Leadership and management**

34. Leadership and management are satisfactory. A4e have successfully improved apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes. Newly implemented processes to support and monitor the effectiveness of all stages in the learner journey have been influential in improving success rates. Monthly meetings for assessors with their manager focus on assessor performance and identify actions for development. Regular team and standardisation meetings take place between assessors at individual centres. The management of subcontractors is satisfactory and improvements in practice are supported well through good audit and direct observations arrangements. However, significant variations in the quality of provision for apprentices exist and there is insufficient overseeing by senior staff to ensure these issues are resolved quickly enough.

35. The self-assessment report is generally accurate but some strengths were judged by inspectors to be only satisfactory. Some issues identified in January 2007 have not yet been improved. The understanding of equality and diversity by staff and learners is satisfactory.

## **Engineering and manufacturing technologies**

### **Good: Grade 2**

#### **Context**

36. A4e's Train to Gain provision provides 200 learners with training in engineering and manufacturing. Most training and assessment, which is subcontracted to four organisations, is delivered in the learners' workplace. Learners follow programmes in engineering, motor vehicle and manufacturing. Manufacturing learners take a range of qualifications including business improvement techniques. Motor vehicle learners take road transport related qualifications. All learners are employed. Currently 21% of learners are female.

#### **Strengths**

- High success rates
- Effective training
- Good levels of improved employer productivity

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Slow achievement of qualifications in manufacturing
- Inconsistency in the standard and quality of reviews

#### **Achievement and standards**

37. Success rates are high. In 2005-06 success rates for manufacturing, engineering and motor vehicle transportation were 89%, 87% and 99% respectively. In 2006-07 motor vehicle transportation success rates are currently 94%. Manufacturing learners make slow progress towards completing their qualification. In 2005-06, of the 323 learners who started, only 19% completed within their planned length of training. Assessment has recently been increased to reduce the time taken to complete, but it is too early to gauge the impact of these actions. Learners' personal and workplace skills are well developed. Most learners currently make good progress, gain confidence and self-esteem and quickly become essential and valued members of their workforce. The standard of training is good and employers are fully involved in training. Learners are well motivated and keen to learn.

#### **Quality of provision**

38. Training is good. All training is carefully contextualised and linked to learners' daily job routines. Training sessions are well planned and managed. Trainers have detailed session plans and the aims and objectives are discussed and agreed with learners. Tutors use a good range of learning support material to better promote learning. Frequent

checks are made through well focused questioning and written assignment work to ensure learners are gaining sufficient knowledge and understanding. Practical tasks are set to align with the specialist work carried out by the individual companies. Recording and monitoring of learner progress is good. All assessment decisions and achievements are recorded and displayed in the training areas. Learners, assessors and employers can quickly see qualification progression and what still needs to be done.

39. Learners' skill development has significantly contributed to employers' increased productivity. Detailed records maintained by one subcontractor specify improvements in the workplace that have led to cost savings or productivity improvements. One group of learners has modified the alignment procedures for pallets saving their company over £21,000 per annum.
40. Assessment and verification is satisfactory. The arrangements for assessments are fair and consistent. Qualified assessors observe learners undertaking practical tasks in the workplace. Assessors also make good use of expert witness testimony.
41. Programmes meet learners' and employers' needs well. Most learners are aware of the progression routes available to them, particularly the possibility of progressing from a level 2 to a level 3 qualification. The range of qualifications currently available is appropriate.
42. Employers, subcontractors and A4e have a satisfactory range of resources to support learning. Support for learners helps them to maintain their motivation and develop vocational skills. Training rooms and the equipment used for training and assessment activities are satisfactory.
43. Learners benefit from a satisfactory induction and are well informed about their role in achieving their qualification. All learners are given good information about their programme during their induction. The information includes details on the complaints and grievance procedures. At induction health, safety and equal opportunities are discussed and explored but the learners' understanding of these matters is not adequately further reinforced during reviews.
44. A4e and their subcontractors have satisfactory arrangements to support the literacy, numeracy and language needs of learners. All learners undertake a diagnostic initial assessment of these support needs and the outcomes are recorded on individual learning plans. Identified numeracy and literacy support is provided by trainer assessors or by subcontractors' staff who are suitably qualified to assess and provide additional support. Learners value the support they receive from assessors who regularly visit the workplace.
45. The quality of progress reviews is inconsistent. Reviews are carried out in the workplace. However, many reviews fail to record in sufficient detail the learners' training journey. There is little reference to pastoral issues. In some cases the document is no more than a list of questions with no records of the progress the learner has made since the last review. In one case the learners completed the review form themselves and little discussion or debate took place. In most cases target-setting is poor. Targets are not specific and cannot always be achieved in the short to medium term. Employers



are not directly involved in reviews or target-setting and they are not always aware of the training required to allow the progress targets to be met.

### **Leadership and management**

46. Communication is good within A4e and between A4e and subcontractors. Staff meetings are held weekly and monthly. Staff have clearly outlined responsibilities and are well motivated and committed to their roles. Learner progress monitoring is well managed and is reviewed at least every 10 to 12 weeks or more frequently to suit the needs of learners. Subcontractors keep employers well informed of learners' progress. Employers speak highly of subcontractors' staff.
47. The management of the internal verification system is satisfactory. Key aspects of training by subcontracted providers are audited by A4e. Actions to overcome areas for improvement are agreed and monitored. Learners' progression and retention rates are closely monitored. Success rates are improving across most areas. Equal opportunities issues are insufficiently reinforced or promoted at reviews.
48. Questionnaires are used to record and evaluate the learners' experience. There is satisfactory use of resources throughout the learning process. Staff development is satisfactory. When the self-assessment report was prepared its focus was on engineering apprenticeships, which are no longer running.

## **Construction, planning and the built environment**

### **Good: Grade 2**

#### **Context**

49. A4e provides Train to Gain programmes to 325 learners. All learners are employed and are working towards NVQs in construction and plant operations, applied waterproof membrane, specialised plant and maintenance operations and formwork. All training and assessment is delivered in the workplace by six subcontractors.

#### **Strengths**

- Good and improving success rates
- Good skills development
- Highly effective engagement of learners

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Some slow achievement of qualifications
- Insufficient opportunities to progress to level 3

#### **Achievement and standards**

50. Success rates are good and improving. Success rates have improved steadily each year for the last three years rising from 80% in 2004-05 to a current success rate of 85%.
51. Learners develop good practical skills and occupational competence in a range of working environments. The less experienced learners quickly improve their techniques and skills through close observation and support for skills development and assessment. Some learners undertake additional training and acquire useful extra qualifications in first aid, manual handling, working at heights and risk assessment. However, the opportunity for additional training is not consistent across all subcontractors.
52. Learners take too long to complete their qualification. While this situation is slowly improving most learners take longer to complete their qualification than planned. For example in 2006-07, only around 25% of all construction learners completed their qualification in the planned time. Learners in the north of England are significantly more successful than those who learn in the Midlands.

#### **Quality of provision**

53. Learners fully and enthusiastically engage in the opportunity to have their skills recognised and gain a certificate of competence after many years working in the industry. Learners are keen to comment about how this programme has raised their self-esteem and confidence and opened up progression opportunities. The programmes closely match employers' needs for a qualified workforce and allow many of them to more easily secure new business and contracts. Initial advice and guidance is effective and learners are fully informed about the programme before they start.

54. Assessment is good. Trainer assessors undertake all assessment and progress reviews at work. Visits are well planned in advance to maximise the assessment opportunities during each visit. Assessors use a variety of methods to enable learners to demonstrate their competence. Assessors are qualified and use their industry experience to support and encourage learners who may have been out of learning for a considerable time. Assessor feedback to learners effectively allows learners to see what they have completed and to know what they still need to do. On this programme there is little need for additional training, but where this is required to supplement the assessment process it is arranged on an individual basis to meet learners' needs.
55. Resources are satisfactory. Learners make good use of digital photography, personal statements, site documentation and case studies to provide evidence for assessment.
56. Overall learner support is good. Learners speak highly of the frequency and regularity of visits by assessors. Learners are well supported throughout the programme. Support for any identified additional learning needs including literacy, numeracy and language is good. Learners also undertake a skills match against their occupational area to ensure the vocational award is relevant and achievable. Some subcontractors also assess learners' preferred learning style and use this to help plan their programme. Induction is generally effective and provides learners with a clear introduction to the requirements of the NVQ.
57. Qualification progression and progress targets are generally well recorded in learner portfolios. Learner reviews focus strongly on qualification progress; however, some records lack detail and are not comprehensive. Overall targets are set and actions agreed with the learner, although specific targets are often missed. Subcontractors make good use of email to communicate learner progress to employers.
58. The range of provision is adequate at level 2. However, opportunities are limited for progression to level 3 in many areas. A small number of level 3 site supervisors are currently the only advanced level construction learners. While learners are keen to know what progression routes are available these opportunities are not well promoted.

### **Leadership and management**

59. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The quality of the subcontracted provision is monitored by A4e through a process of visits which sample each subcontractor's work in depth. However, most of the construction provision has not yet been through a cycle of what is a recently introduced, new quality improvement process. A4e currently rely on the generally effective systems and procedures developed by subcontractors to improve provision and raise success rates.
60. Data on the performance of the programmes is routinely collected by A4e. However, it is not always presented in a clear way to show individual learners' progress set against their performance targets.
61. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is adequate. Equality of opportunity is discussed during induction and at reviews. Useful workshops and handouts are used to support the discussions. However, due to the short nature of these programmes, and the small number of reviews, further reinforcement is limited.

62. Internal verification and assessment arrangements are good. The self-assessment report is brief and not specific enough. It recognised some of the strengths identified by inspectors, but not the main areas for improvement.

## Preparation for life and work

### Satisfactory: Grade 3

#### Context

63. A4e has a direct contract to provide E2E training in South Yorkshire and Humberside. Morthyng Training also subcontracts to A4e to provide E2E training in Wallasey. Currently 81 learners are on programme, of whom 59 are in the directly delivered provision in Sheffield, Scunthorpe, and Grimsby, and 22 are in the subcontracted provision in Wallasey. There are 44 male learners and six learners are from a minority ethnic background. Learners' programmes are for a minimum of 16 hours per week.

#### Strengths

- Good development of confidence and social skills
- Good support for learners' personal and social needs

#### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient planning of individual learning programmes
- Insufficient opportunities to develop vocational skills

#### Achievement and standards

64. Learners' development of confidence and self-esteem is good. Lack of confidence and motivation are the most significant barriers to progression for most of the learners on the programme. Learners enjoy meeting new people and working with others and gain confidence speaking in groups and expressing their opinions. Learners develop good personal and social skills and improve their teamwork. The motivation of many learners to gain employment or go on to further education or training is increased. Learners' attendance is satisfactory.
65. Rates of progression are satisfactory overall and they have improved from 38% in 2004-05 and 2005-06, to 56% in 2006-07. In the subcontracted provision in Wallasey, rates of progression are high at 71%. However, in Sheffield progression rates are low at 42%.
66. Learners' progress overall is satisfactory. Progress in developing a positive attitude and increased levels of motivation is good. However, the development of workplace skills and literacy and numeracy skills is slow.

#### Quality of provision

67. Support for learners' personal and social needs is good. Tutors are sensitive to the personal difficulties learners face and demonstrate genuine interest and care for them. Learners have a good understanding of issues that affect their lives. Learners increase their awareness of such issues as sexual health, substance and alcohol misuse and have a good knowledge of where to find help. Some tutors are specialists in sexual health matters. Links with external providers and support agencies are good. Tutors direct learners to specialist help or advocate on their behalf. Learners benefit from training in

first aid and paediatric first aid and are confident to cope with accidents in the home. Information, advice and career guidance are satisfactory. A4e work closely with Connexions to provide good information and guidance.

68. Initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy, personal, social needs and vocational interest is satisfactory. In the subcontracted provision, all learners undertake a six week assessment period. In the direct contract provision, some new learners are inappropriately included in learning sessions alongside learners who have been on programme for many months.
69. Planning of individual learning is insufficient. Schemes of work are rarely used to set weekly timetables or plan for individual skills development in literacy or numeracy. Attendance is insufficiently carefully monitored to ensure that learners only attend sessions they require. Learner passports and activity logs are not always used effectively to measure progress, plan learning or set targets. Participation and achievement in skills for life qualifications is low. This area for improvement does not include the provision in Wallasey, where planning of individual learning is mostly good.
70. Opportunities for learners to develop vocational skills and experience are insufficient. Too few learners have a work placement or an appropriate vocational experience. Some learners are on programme for up to 36 weeks without a work placement or suitable alternative. Some learners are not yet ready to have a work placement. However, there are insufficient alternative arrangements to enable learners to gain practical experience from which to base their future choices. This strand of the programme is insufficiently developed with too much jobsearch for learners that are not job ready and are unclear of their vocational aspiration. This area for improvement does not apply to the provision in Wallasey where the vocational strand of the programme is satisfactory.

### **Leadership and management**

71. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers set a clear direction to raise standards and improve the provision and this has positively impacted on progression rates. Communication is good. However, tutors are not sufficiently aware of issues in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report did not identify some of the areas for improvement found on inspection. Although audits of files monitor compliance, they do not adequately monitor the quality of the content of such things as learner reviews. There is insufficient observation of all parts of the E2E learner process to fully and accurately gauge the learners' experience.
72. Staff, accommodation, and resources are satisfactory. Tutors have good skills and experience in working with disadvantaged learners. Tutors responsible for the teaching of literacy and numeracy do not all hold and are not working towards a level 4 subject qualification in literacy or numeracy.
73. Equality and diversity is satisfactory. Learners feel safe at A4e and understand their rights. Tutors promote positive behaviour in sessions. However, too few learners recall the content of information given as part of their induction and further promotion of equal opportunities at reviews is superficial. Management information is insufficiently used to monitor the performance of different centres or groups of learners.



## **Business, administration and law**

### **Satisfactory: Grade 3**

#### **Context**

74. A4e provides training in business administration, customer service and management. Currently A4e has 76 apprentices, 17 advanced apprentices and 360 learners on its Train to Gain programme. Apprenticeship training and assessment is delivered by A4e staff. The Train to Gain programme is delivered by six subcontractors.

#### **Strengths**

- Good acquisition of skills by apprentices
- Effective actions to improve provision

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Insufficient off-the-job training for apprentices
- Slow achievement of qualifications by many learners

#### **Achievement and standards**

75. Apprentices acquire good skills and they enjoy their learning. They develop good workplace competences to better equip them to deal with colleagues and the wider public. Learners' organisational skills develop well alongside their improved self-confidence. Employers are impressed at how learners are better able to organise their time and work tasks. The development of learners' vocational knowledge and skills in the workplace is good. Key workplace tasks are completed more effectively. Some learners are now proficient in the use of specialist legal and accounting software and many use the internet effectively to research information and extend their learning. Some learners make significant contributions to their organisations. For example, one learner manages monthly work scheduling, designed the company's website, and produces comprehensive fire risk assessments for clients. Many learners gain additional roles and responsibilities in their workplace and some have gained promotion.
76. The standard of learners' work is at least satisfactory and much is good. Portfolios are well structured with a good range of evidence.
77. Several learners have made good progress from the E2E programmes to apprenticeships. However, progression from apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships is low at around 10%.
78. Overall success rates are satisfactory. Apprentices' success rates have improved each year for the last three years and so far in 2006-07 are 55% for advanced and 63% for apprentices. Train to Gain success rates are satisfactory at 83% currently, rising from 64% last year.
79. Many learners take too long to achieve their qualifications. Timely success rates are low with around two-thirds of learners taking longer to complete than planned. However,



recent improvements to the programmes have benefited recently recruited apprentices who demonstrate much improved progress.

### **Quality of provision**

80. Employer involvement and the arrangements for on-the-job training are satisfactory. With the best arrangements supportive employers are keen to provide good skills development opportunities at work, including job rotation or shadowing colleagues to broaden learners' knowledge and understanding of key processes. In the less effective arrangements learners have little support from their employers and on-the-job training is informal. Assessment is satisfactory and feedback is used well to focus learners on skills they still need to learn. Progress reviews are satisfactory. Good use is made of clear short-term action-planning to motivate learners.
81. The quality of information, advice and guidance is satisfactory although not always sufficiently impartial. Programmes are well matched to meet the needs of learners and employers.
82. Support for learners is satisfactory. Apprentices receive a good basic induction which helps them to settle into their programme quickly. Some Train to Gain learners are insufficiently well briefed on the demands of the programme. Initial assessment is satisfactory and appropriate support is provided to meet identified needs in literacy and numeracy. Assessors are accessible, helpful and work flexibly to meet learners' and employers' needs. Where extra support is required, assessors visit more frequently.
83. The provision of structured off-the-job training for apprentices is insufficient. Scheduled training sessions at centres have recently been implemented but are mainly for key skills and technical certificates with very little vocational training offered. Attendance is low. Learners are not always aware of, or sufficiently encouraged to attend these sessions. Little opportunity is available for learners to take additional qualifications. Train to Gain management learners in the North East have formal off-the-job training but this is infrequent and sometimes poorly attended.

### **Leadership and management**

84. Leadership and management is satisfactory overall. However, recent actions taken to improve the provision have had a particularly positive impact on success rates. The new monitoring arrangements that look closely at the effectiveness of each stage in the learner journey help staff to identify slow progress more quickly. Tutors and assessors now respond, in particular, to the slow progress of individual learners more effectively. Internal verification is satisfactory with regular national and regional co-ordination meetings to review and standardise practice. Staff workloads are well managed with monthly individual reviews to check learner progress against targets. Support for new staff is good. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and have good access to additional training where required. Good practice and quality improvement issues are communicated quickly to staff through regular team meetings.
85. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. Appropriate workbooks are provided to learners although few electronic learning materials are available to support independent

study. Some assessors use digital tape players and video to capture work derived evidence for assessment purposes.

86. Self-assessment is inclusive and the report is broadly accurate. Equality and diversity are managed appropriately and satisfactorily promoted and reinforced. Learners display a good awareness and understanding of equality issues.

## Annex

## Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning apprenticeship programmes managed by A4e 2003-04 to 2005-06

## Health, public services and care

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	30	20	51	7	27
		timely	21	10	31	3	16
	04-05	overall	36	28	47	11	21
		timely	46	13	28	0	12
	05-06	overall	61	30	53	31	34
		timely	73	10	29	10	17
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	133	8	43	3	17
		timely	126	1	18	0	6
	04-05	overall	159	19	46	14	29
		timely	180	6	21	5	13
	05-06	overall	122	41	58	39	50
		timely	124	10	31	10	25

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

## Business, administration and law

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	72	28	46	10	28
		timely	64	19	30	6	18
	04-05	overall	24	21	47	17	32
		timely	26	8	34	4	23
	05-06	overall	23	22	59	22	51
		timely	20	0	44	0	37
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	142	32	51	16	38
		timely	123	7	25	2	18
	04-05	overall	121	36	56	35	46
		timely	127	15	35	14	29
	05-06	overall	120	52	63	48	58
		timely	115	34	44	30	41

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

## Annex

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain** programmes managed by the a4e  
2005-06 to 2006-07

## Health, public services and care

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	05-06	overall	379	84
		timely	434	46
	06-07	overall	655	79
		timely	774	53

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain** programmes managed by the a4e  
2005-06 to 2006-07

## Business, administration and law

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	05-06	overall	146	64
		timely	178	29
	06-07	overall	468	83
		timely	735	36

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain** programmes managed by the a4e  
2005-06 to 2006-07

## Construction, planning and the built environment

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	05-06	overall	128	83
		timely	151	40
	06-07	overall	386	85
		timely	643	45

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'

## Annex

Success rates on **work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes** managed by the a4e  
2005-06 to 2006-07

## Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	05-06	overall	819	90
		timely	840	51
	06-07	overall	769	92
		timely	989	52

\* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

\*\* College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

\*\*\* Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'