

MONITORING VISIT: MAIN FINDINGS

Name of provider: Aylesbury Training Group

Date of visit: 3 July 2007

Context

Aylesbury Training Group (ATG) is a registered charity established in 1967 to provide first-year training for engineering apprentices. A chief executive, appointed by a board of directors, manages the company which is based on four sites with two main sites in Aylesbury. ATG's head office is located in its technical training centre in Aylesbury.

The quality monitoring visit report in February 2005 judged that ATG continued to build on the improvements identified at the reinspection. This monitoring visit follows the inspection of ATG in April 2006. The inspection judged that leadership and management and the provider's arrangements for quality improvement were good, while equality of opportunity was satisfactory. Apprenticeships for young people in health, public services and care, including the contributory areas of social care and early years were good. Engineering and manufacturing technologies apprenticeships for young people were satisfactory. The contributory area of manufacturing technologies included Train to Gain learners. Overall, apprenticeships in business, administration and law were good.

ATG is the largest work-based learning provider funded by Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC). ATG also has a national LSC contract.

The provider has 598 apprentices and 279 advanced apprentices, and 34 learners following national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Of these, 67% are men and 12% are from minority ethnic groups. ATG is a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) for cycle maintenance. It is also the lead partner in an engineering CoVE consortium consisting of a college, a training provider and two large employers.

Achievement and standards

Are work-based learning framework success rates high and improving?	Significant progress
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ATG has made significant progress in ensuring work-based learning framework success rates have improved to a high rate since the previous inspection. Overall framework success rates have improved between 2004-05 and 2006-07. Success rates were 14% above the national average in 2005-06 and the provider's data for

the first six months of 2006-07 indicates a further improvement to 24% above the national average. Apprenticeship and NVQ-only success rates show a similar trend. Overall timely success rates have continued to improve and are 7% above national averages in 2006-07. Advanced apprenticeship timely success rates for 2004-05 and 2005-06 are well above the national averages. Overall and timely success rates for NVQ courses only for 2003-2006 are below the national averages. However, data for 2006-07 shows improvements to above the national averages. The provider monitors and analyses data well and takes prompt action to resolve identified issues.

Quality of provision

Has the provider ensured a consistent and effective approach to initial assessment?	Significant progress
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A key area for improvement identified at the previous inspection was ensuring that initial assessment was consistent and effective. ATG has made significant progress with this key challenge. All the providers' sector subject areas now initially assess learners' prior levels of learning and achievement. These arrangements are systematic, consistent and effective. All learners are assessed to identify their literacy, numeracy and language needs and vocational skills. The provider reinforces this with an individual initial interview. Learners complete a self-assessment of their strengths and weaknesses at induction. The findings from these arrangements are summarised in an initial assessment overview of each learner. This is used to plan the learners' training and support requirements. These arrangements have been particularly effective and have contributed to the significant overall increase in success rates.

Have the instances of poor review practices in engineering and manufacturing technologies improved?	Reasonable progress
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At the inspection, reviews in engineering and manufacturing technologies were judged to provide good coverage of the NVQ and the progress that learners have made while studying. However, progress on technical certificates was not well recorded and many employers complained that they were not well informed on progress in this area. ATG has made reasonable progress in resolving this area for improvement. Reviews now cover progress with technical certificates effectively, with the review form providing a clear numerical analysis of each learner's progress. ATG has strengthened its discussions with employers at reviews. Improvements have been made to the level of information that employers receive to ensure they now have a better understanding of learners' progress with technical certificates. However, although the progress review forms contain useful written commentary on learners' progress, they are insufficiently precise and learning targets lack clear detail. ATG has not surveyed employers systematically to check if they receive sufficient information on learners' progress with technical certificates.

What actions have been taken to provide learners with up-to-date equipment and accessible resources?	Significant progress
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ATG has made significant progress in addressing comments made by learners at the previous inspection. Learners requested improvements to documents which were out of date, equipment which was not always available and the website which was difficult to read. ATG has responded quickly and effectively to support learners' needs in these areas. A fund from the Association of Learning Providers has supported the development of a new website and learning platform. Access to the website is much improved with clear sections for learners and employers. Learners can easily find information on programme requirements, support and entitlement and can read text in different sizes. Staff are well represented on industry and qualification working groups and have been able quickly to resolve issues of inappropriate programme documents. ATG has responded particularly effectively to issues of supplying industry-standard resources in the short-term and the long-term. The board of directors has agreed significant capital expenditure, investment in resources to meet existing need, planned growth and curriculum expansion. Four new milling machines have been acquired and 12 industry-standard desktop computers. The provider has established strong links with employers and local technical schools and has been successful in the first round of Gateway bids. It will lead on the new specialised engineering diploma and is involved in an information and communication technology diploma.

Leadership and management

Does the provider have a clear strategy for promoting equality of opportunity and is this monitored systematically?	Reasonable progress
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At the inspection, inspectors judged that equality of opportunity was poorly promoted, learners had insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity and the equality and diversity action plan was not monitored. The provider has made reasonable progress in this area. Actions from the equality and diversity working group and the equality and diversity action plan for 2006-07 are monitored and signed off through the quality improvement meetings. The provider has tested a bank of resource questions with assessors and in May 2007 it provided assessors with a detailed information and guidance pack to support the content of review sessions. Assessors have started to discuss the effectiveness of the new resources through standardisation meetings. Records of discussion with learners in the new review form reflect themes discussed but contain little evidence of learners' views and understanding. Review records are audited for content but not quality. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the new process has yet to be carried out. Learners interviewed had a good sense of employment rights and responsibilities but insufficient understanding of the broader aspects of equality and diversity. Access for learners with restricted mobility has been improved since the previous inspection. All centres have ramps, toilets for the disabled and access to ground floor facilities.

Centres with poor access have been closed. Staff training is planned, with the timing of workshops staggered to facilitate attendance, but learners have insufficient formal training opportunities. The recent introduction of posters in the workshops has been useful in reinforcing an understanding of employment rights and responsibilities and raising awareness of cultural differences, but promotion through visual information and display is underused.

How adequate and effective are the self-assessment process and development plan?	Significant progress
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The inspection report judged that the self-assessment process was thorough and overall self-assessment was satisfactory. ATG has made significant progress in improving the self-assessment process. It has maintained the thoroughness and full involvement of staff. It now makes substantial and better use of the observations of all aspects of the learning process and the very thorough data on learners' success rates to make judgements. This is reinforced by bringing together ATG's documents into one cohesive set so the same assessment criteria can be applied to all parts of the provider's work. The self-assessment report provides an accurate assessment of ATG's performance, particularly those areas that ATG had previously identified as strengths but which inspectors had considered at the inspection to be mainly normal practice. The provider's quality development plan has a clear and effective link to the strengths and areas for improvements in the self-assessment report. The plan clearly indicates strengths, areas for improvement, actions, responsibilities, monitoring arrangements and timescales. Managers regularly use the quality development plan to check the progress they are making in maintaining strengths and remedying areas for improvement.