



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT SEPTEMBER 2000

Access Training Limited

SUMMARY

Access Training Limited offers good training programmes in manufacturing. Trainees receive good on-the-job training and a high proportion find jobs. Business administration programmes are satisfactory but work-based supervisors are insufficiently involved in assessment. Retailing and customer service programmes are satisfactory. Achievement rates are high on the call-centre techniques course, but assessment is not well planned in warehousing. Off-the-job training in hospitality is good, but trainees have been given incorrect information about the requirements for modern apprenticeships. Equal opportunities, trainee support, management of training and quality assurance are all satisfactory. Equal opportunities data are analysed and used in action-planning. Hospitality trainees are not given enough training on equal opportunities. The training programmes are promoted effectively to potential trainees and a wide range of additional courses and qualifications is available. Individual training plans are not used effectively. There is an open, consultative management style, but insufficient management of subcontractors. Some internal verification is not planned effectively and there is insufficient feedback from employers on quality assurance issues.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Manufacturing	2
Business administration	3
Retailing & customer service	3
Hospitality	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ particularly good learning opportunities at work placements
- ◆ good assessment practice in manufacturing, customer service and hospitality
- ◆ strong emphasis given to equal opportunities
- ◆ good personal support for trainees
- ◆ good staff development arrangements
- ◆ strong links with employers
- ◆ thorough self-assessment procedures

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient off-the-job training in manufacturing, retailing and customer service
- ◆ low achievement rates in business administration
- ◆ no monitoring of employers or subcontractors' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ inconsistent initial assessment
- ◆ ineffective measures to reduce early leavers' rate
- ◆ weak management of subcontractors

INTRODUCTION

1. Access Training Limited (ATL) was formed in 1989, following a management buy-out of English Estates Youth Training Scheme. It operates from a training centre in one of the largest industrial and business estates in England in the Team Valley, Gateshead. The organisation contracts with Tyneside Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) and offers training to young people and adults in manufacturing, business administration, retailing and customer service, and hospitality. The call-centre training programme is funded from the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) through Tyneside TEC. Access Training has a contract with the Newcastle Unit of Delivery for off-the-job training for New Deal clients following the voluntary sector and employment options. It also has a contract with the Employment Service for the full-time education and training option on the New Deal and acts as a subcontractor to other New Deal providers. It uses subcontractors to deliver off-the-job training in accountancy, business administration for some New Deal clients, and call-centre training. A subcontractor manages the hospitality programme. There are 212 trainees and nine New Deal clients on the following programmes:

PROGRAMMES	Modern apprenticeships	National traineeships	Other programmes	Work-based learning for adults	Single Regeneration Budget	New Deal	Totals
Manufacturing			18			2	20
Business administration	44	60	15	7		5	131
Retailing & customer service	1	3	30	8	6		48
Hospitality	18	2				2	22
Total	63	65	63	15	6	9	221

2. Twenty-six per cent of companies based in Tyneside are located in Gateshead. A large number of these are in the manufacturing sector, but the local economy is dominated by small, service sector companies. There is a shortage of skilled workers in all occupational areas. Access Training contracts with over 150 local employers. Over 75 per cent of trainees on the youth programmes are employed. The company offers off-the-job training and workplace assessment to other training providers and manages an engineering modern apprenticeship programme for another training provider. There are 13 full-time and six part-time staff.

3. Unemployment in Tyneside is high, at 6.9 per cent in North Tyneside and 11.1 per cent in South Tyneside, compared with the average rate in England of 3.5 per

cent. The unemployment rate for men is almost three times that for women. The educational achievements for school leavers in the area are lower than the national average. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 39.1 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. Sixty-one per cent of 16 year olds remained in full-time education and training, 17 per cent entering government-supported training. The comparable average figures for England were 69 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. According to the 1999 Labour Force Survey, 1.7 per cent of Tyneside's population aged 16 and above was from minority ethnic groups.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. The company's self-assessment process is co-ordinated by the managing director, working closely with the other members of the management team. In preparation for inspection the company produced its third self-assessment report. As part of the process, all staff were consulted and information was gathered from trainees, New Deal clients and employers. A draft report was presented to members of staff for comment and approval. An action plan was drawn up and some actions had been completed by the time of the inspection. Inspectors found the report helpful in preparing for the inspection. They agreed with many of the judgements in the report but identified some additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with three of the grades in the self-assessment report and awarded one higher grade and four lower grades.

5. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at Access Training in September 2000. They interviewed 65 trainees, 12 of the company's staff, six subcontractors' staff and 23 workplace supervisors and employers. They visited 26 work placements. They observed and graded training and assessment sessions. Inspectors examined trainees' individual training plans, progress-review records, files and portfolios. A wide range of other documents was examined including contracts, external reports, internal reports, minutes of meetings, staff personnel records, policies and procedures.

Grades awarded to observed instruction sessions

	GRADE 1	GRADE 2	GRADE 3	GRADE 4	GRADE 5	TOTAL
Manufacturing		3	1			4
Business administration		3	1			4
Retailing & customer service		3	1			4
Hospitality		4				4
Total	0	13	3	0	0	16

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Manufacturing

Grade 2

6. ATL offers training programmes in manufacturing at national vocational qualification (NVQ) levels 1 and 2. There are 18 trainees on the work-based programmes for young people. Fifteen are employed. The number of youth trainees has more than doubled over the past three years. There are two New Deal clients on the employment option. New Deal clients aim to complete three or four units of the NVQ at level 2 during their six-month training period. The work placements for both trainees and New Deal clients cover a wide range of

manufacturing processes and materials. Trainees are able to join the manufacturing programme at any time of the year. All training is done in the workplace. Trainees receive an induction which includes health and safety instruction. There are plans to develop off-the-job training materials. Three members of the full-time staff are responsible for the training and assessment in manufacturing. All have trainers and assessors' qualifications. The general manager of Access Training has responsibility for all internal verification of manufacturing programmes. New Deal clients' progress reviews are carried out monthly. Progress reviews for work-based trainees are completed every two months. At the beginning of the programme, there are more frequent monitoring visits, often every two weeks. Over the past three years, 65 per cent of youth trainees and 89 per cent of adults have gained jobs after leaving the programme. In 1997-98, of five starters on the youth programme, none achieved an NVQ. In 1998-99, eight out of 18 starters achieved an NVQ at level 2. In 1999-2000, four out of 12 leavers achieved an NVQ at level 2. In the past three years, only one of the 10 New Deal clients has achieved all elements of their individual training plan. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ good rate of progression to employment
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good on-the-job training
- ◆ thorough assessment practices

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient off-the-job training
- ◆ assessors' lack of experience in manufacturing processes

7. Progression rates into employment are good. In 1996-97, seven out of 14 youth trainees who started training were employed when they left the programme; in 1997-98, three out of five were employed; and in 1998-99, 15 out of 18 trainees who started training were employed. The figures are higher for the adult programme. In 1997-98, 51 out of 59 trainees who started training were employed; in 1998-99, 39 out of 42 trainees who started training were employed; and in 1999-2000, the two trainees who started training were both employed on leaving the programme. New Deal clients have progressed well on the employment option. Many complete the target of three to four units of the NVQ within the six-month allocated training period. There is good communication with the Employment Service. Work placements with employers are well established. Many companies continue training clients after completion of the New Deal programme and some clients gain additional units towards an NVQ.

8. The manufacturing NVQ is popular with local employers Access Training successfully encourages companies to promote the qualification to more experienced members of the workforce. Some trainees already in employment have been encouraged to work towards the NVQ. This has resulted in a better understanding of the qualification within organisations and a higher standard of workplace support for trainees and New Deal clients. Training staff and employers have tailored the programme to meet individual requirements.

9. On-the-job training is well planned. Tasks are identified which enable trainees to demonstrate occupational competence in a wide variety of manufacturing skills. Trainees are allocated mentors to supervise their work and this helps them to produce evidence of competence. The responses to questionnaires and inspection interviews indicate that trainees are satisfied with the manufacturing training Access Training ensures that trainees are kept well informed of health and safety regulations and the way in which they relate to the work situation. Trainees' portfolios include records of risk assessments. The training activities include completion of health and safety questionnaires on a variety of topics. The responses are recorded as evidence of competence for units of the NVQ.

10. Assessment is thorough and covers activities from the whole production process. A wide variety of assessment methods is used. Trainees are regularly observed completing relevant tasks. Good use is made of on-the-job company records and questioning to support claims of competence. These assessment methods are supported by comprehensive portfolio entries and witness statements endorsed by mentors. In some cases trainees make specific requests for assessment, which are quickly followed up by training advisors. There are examples of trainees recognising opportunities for observation and assessment in the workplace. Good communication among training advisors, trainees and employers has resulted in assessment taking place at the most appropriate time.

11. Trainees gain most of their skills on the job. There is insufficient off-the-job training, and as a result trainees have not achieved some modules relating to the manufacturing industry. Modules are in preparation and are expected to be available early in 2001. In some cases this delay has meant that trainees have been unable to broaden their range of skills to improve their career prospects.

12. ATL's assessors have insufficient experience of the manufacturing industry. Responsibility for the identification of workplace evidence currently lies mainly with workplace mentors or supervisors. The general manager of ATL, who acts as the internal verifier, also helps assessors to identify appropriate evidence. A programme of visits and secondments to a variety of manufacturing companies is now underway.

Grade 3

Business administration

13. ATL offers training programmes leading to NVQs at levels 2, 3 and 4 in accounting, administration and information technology. Some trainees are employed when they start their programme. Trainees who are not already employed are given work placements which give potential employment opportunities. There is a wide range of administrative posts available in this area. Most trainees are modern apprentices or national trainees but training is also available for adults and New Deal clients. There is one subcontractor which delivers training in accountancy and another which offers specialist training to New Deal clients. There are currently 131 trainees on the following training programmes:

PROGRAMMES	Modern apprenticeships	National traineeships	Other training	Work-based learning for adults	New Deal	Totals
Administration NVQ at level 2	10	58	6		2	76
Administration NVQ at level 3	19		8			27
Information technology NVQ at level 3			1			1
Accounting NVQ at level 2	3					3
Accounting NVQ at level 4	7					7
Other additional qualifications	5	2		7	3	17
Total	44	60	15	7	5	131

14. Trainees and New Deal clients are trained and assessed by a team of four full-time and three part-time trainers/assessors. All staff have relevant training and assessors' qualifications and occupational experience. Trainees attend the company's training centre or a local college of further education for portfolio-building, training and examination practice. Youth trainees following administration programmes start in groups over the summer period and receive an induction programme at the training centre covering equal opportunities, health and safety, computer training, practice for text-processing examinations and work towards key skills. Trainees moving straight on to work placements receive a shortened induction programme. Progress reviews are carried out by trainers/assessors in the workplace. Figures for youth trainees entering training have remained fairly constant over the past three years, averaging 90 entrants each year. During the current contract year, Access Training has placed more emphasis on recruiting trainees onto the national traineeship programme with the expectation that most will progress onto modern apprenticeships. Numbers of trainees entering adult training have decreased from 171 in 1997-98 to 13 in 1999-2000.

The statistics for achievement and retention on the business administration programmes are summarised in the following table:

	Modern Apprenticeships		Other training		Other work-based learning for adults	
	1997-98	1998-99	1997-98	1998-1999	1997-98	1998-1999
Starters	48	34	45	68	149	51
Achieved ITP	11	7	18	23	35	17
No NVQ at level 2	13	19	20	34	30	17
No NVQ at level 3	14	6	5	5		
Jobs gained	48	34	19	18	113	29
Still in training	6	16	1	11		

15. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report but considered that training relating to key skills and assessment, which were assessed by the company as strengths, were no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-resourced training facilities
- ◆ frequent contact with trainees
- ◆ good learning opportunities at work

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient involvement of workplace supervisors in assessment
- ◆ ineffective target-setting
- ◆ low achievement rates for some trainees

16. The business administration staff are occupationally well qualified and hold advanced training qualifications. They have substantial occupational experience including training and assessment. They have well-developed interpersonal skills, which help to establish good relationships with trainees. The training centre has a good range of computer equipment, industry standard software and access to the Internet. The staff have developed a wide range of open learning materials for information technology. This enables trainees to work at their own pace. Trainees have access to appropriate reference books which help them to understand the subjects and to conduct research for project work. The staff have lesson plans and teaching resources for subjects such as filing, mail and stock control. These help to

give background knowledge and understanding to support the practical skills gained in the workplace. Trainees' opinions of training are positive.

17. Trainees attend the training centre for off-the-job training. This is usually arranged on a weekly basis, but when necessary, trainees are able to vary their attendance to suit their workload. Regular progress reviews add to this weekly contact. Visits are made to the trainees to review their progress every eight weeks. Progress reviews include workplace supervisors and cover topics such as performance at work, progress, attitude and attendance. If problems are identified, measures are taken to resolve them.

18. The company has contacts with a broad range of employers who give good learning opportunities for trainees, whether on an employed or a work-placement basis. Trainees are quickly matched to employers for work experience. The employers include small, medium and large companies operating locally to internationally. Currently, 70 per cent of youth trainees are employed. Trainees are able to move between employers without delay if the work experience does not meet their expectations. The range of employers allows trainees to collect appropriate evidence of their occupational competence and key skills. Trainees are observed at work and there are plans to assess their key skills during the observations. Access Training keeps a list of employment vacancies and 56 per cent of adult trainees have gained jobs. Some employers allow trainees to gain additional qualifications alongside their NVQs and some larger employers have well-structured and well-planned on-the-job training programmes. Access Training is able to offer some trainees the opportunity to work towards higher level qualifications on achievement of their modern apprenticeship.

19. Workplace supervisors are not routinely involved in the assessment process, other than commenting on performance at work during progress reviews. Trainees collect evidence such as daily work schedules and diaries from the workplace to demonstrate occupational competence, knowledge and understanding. Workplace supervisors are rarely asked to produce witness testimonies for their trainees. Evidence collected in the workplace is not routinely authenticated by either the assessor or the workplace supervisor. Assessments are not planned in sufficient detail in advance and trainees are not always aware of which elements or units are to be assessed during a workplace visit. Most feedback from assessments is informal and trainees are not given written details of assessment decisions made. Trainees following accountancy programmes produce evidence from the workplace but do not receive work-based observations. Access Training has identified this as a weakness and has taken action to remedy it.

20. Trainees are not set challenging short- and medium-term targets. Individual training plans do not include target dates for the achievement of units. Individual short-term action plans help to structure off-the-job training. The action plans also instruct the trainees on the types of evidence they need to collect, which trainees find useful. However, if planned work is not completed, it is simply transferred to the next action plan. Some trainees regularly fail to complete the work in their action plan, resulting in many extensions to their achievement dates and slow

progress. This weakness has not been identified through the internal verification procedures.

21. Achievement of individual training plans has been low for starters over the past three years. Out of 100 starters on the modern apprenticeship programme, 33 are still in training. Out of the 67 leavers, 27 per cent have achieved their individual training plans and 55 per cent have left early with no qualifications. Twelve per cent have left early with an NVQ at level 3. In other training for young people, there have been 129 starters over the past three years with 18 still in training. Out of the 111 leavers, 38 per cent have achieved their individual training plans and 62 per cent have left early with no qualification.

Retailing & customer service

Grade 3

22. ATL offers training programmes in customer service, distribution and warehouse operations, and call-centre techniques. There are 48 trainees on the following programmes:

	Modern apprenticeships	National traineeships	Other youth programmes	Work-based learning for adults	Single Regeneration Budget	Totals
Warehousing NVQ at level 2			26			26
Warehousing NVQ at level 3			1			1
Customer service NVQ at level 2	1	3	3			7
Call centre techniques				8	6	14
Total	1	3	30	8	6	48

23. All customer service trainees are employed. Employers range in type from a small accounting firm to large public sector organisations. Most training and assessment takes place in the workplace. There are three full-time trainers/assessors, two for warehousing and one for customer service. Some employers offer additional in-house training. A customer service workshop has been developed and there are plans to offer more off-the-job training. Of 11 modern apprentices starting in the past three years, two trainees have achieved an NVQ in customer service. Two national traineeship starters both achieved the aims of their individual training plan. Sixty-seven per cent of warehousing trainees are employed. There is a wide range of employers, from small warehouses and distribution centres to large, multinational companies. Most training and assessment takes place in the workplace. Training for manual lifting and handling, and health and safety, is given by Access Training and supported by employers in most cases. Off-the-job training covering background knowledge has recently been introduced. Out of 45 youth trainees starting in the past three years, 15 have achieved an NVQ at level 2 in either customer service or warehousing. Of 82 adults starting training in the past three years, 18 have achieved the targets in their

individual training plans. The call-centre techniques programme has been operating for almost a year. It is a three-week course and takes place at a local college. There is a 93 per cent achievement rate for the certificate. Many trainees move into employment with the large call-centre companies in the area. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses, but agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective individual training plans in customer service
- ◆ good assessment practices in customer service
- ◆ effective involvement of employers
- ◆ good achievement rates on call-centre techniques course

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequately planned assessment in warehousing
- ◆ insufficient awareness by trainees of progression to NVQ in warehousing and customer service
- ◆ low attendance rates at warehousing off-the-job training

24. On customer service programmes, individual training plans are clear and concise, closely linked to the trainees' job role and a useful reference for both the trainee and the workplace supervisor. There are frequent assessment visits in customer service, often taking place every three weeks. Additional visits are scheduled if necessary. Trainees are enthusiastic about their training programmes and value the support of assessors. Observation and other evidence from the workplace is used in all the units and recorded on the assessment plan. Projects to develop trainees' key skills are included in the programmes from the early stages. The equal opportunities training also includes a new project on the induction programme which is linked to the acquisition of key skills. Some trainees have achieved an administration qualification and this has been used as evidence towards the customer service NVQ. Feedback on assessment is discussed and recorded, although this does not always happen immediately. Witness testimonies and employers' statements are included in trainees' portfolios.

25. Employers are very supportive of the training programmes and work closely with staff from ATL. Some additional training courses are offered, such as health and safety in warehousing and telephone techniques in customer service. The on-the-job training given by employers in warehousing is recorded in a training log, but this good practice does not apply across the occupational area. Some employers have had several trainees and many offer them employment, often within three months of the start of the training programme.

26. The call-centre techniques course has a high success rate, with 93 per cent achieving the certificate. Sixty per cent of trainees have progressed into employment. Trainees are able to continue on the next scheduled course if they need more time to achieve their targets. There is a ratio of one trainer/assessor to every seven trainees. The course helps people who initially often have low levels of confidence to gain employment in this rapidly growing work area.

27. In warehousing, staff visit the workplace regularly on a four-weekly basis, but some visits are purely for progress-review purposes and opportunities are not taken to carry out assessments at the same time. As a result, some trainees are making slow progress and are becoming demotivated. There are no assessment plans. Workplace supervisors do not have access to training plans to help them to guide trainees between visits by staff from ATL. Insufficient use is made of witness testimonies or employers' statements. These missed opportunities for assessment hinder the progress of trainees and delay the achievement of NVQs.

28. In customer service and warehousing, several units are often assessed at the same time. There is no recording of the achievement of elements within a unit, making it difficult for trainees to keep track of what has been achieved and what they should be working towards.

29. The staff at Access Training are in the process of developing off-the-job training modules. Several of these have been running since April, but only a third of warehousing trainees have attended the programmes on any one date. Those trainees who attended a customer handling training module found that they had a better understanding of their customers and how to deal with them as a result.

Hospitality

Grade 3

30. There are 20 youth trainees and two New Deal clients. Youth trainees are employed in establishments ranging from large hotels to small public houses. Most are recruited onto the programme through their employer. The New Deal clients are on the full-time education and training option and are working towards units of the NVQ at level 2 and key skills. All the hospitality training is subcontracted. Trainees are able to attend regular off-the-job training sessions. Qualified and experienced assessors carry out assessments. Some employers have qualified work-based assessors. The training programme has been running for 12 months and two trainees have so far achieved an NVQ in hospitality. Out of six trainees starting on national traineeship programmes in 1999-2000, four have left with no qualifications. One New Deal client achieved the four units identified on the individual training plan, moved into full-time employment and is now on a national traineeship programme. Inspectors agreed with most of the judgements in the self-assessment report, but identified additional strengths and weaknesses. They agreed with the grade given in the self-assessment report.

PROGRAMMES	Modern apprenticeships	National traineeships	Other youth training	Work-based learning for adults	New Deal	Totals
Housekeeping NVQ at level 2	1					1
Bar service NVQ at level 2	10	2			2	14
Restaurant supervision NVQ at level 3	2					2
Front office supervision NVQ at level 3	2					2
Licensed premises supervision NVQ at level 3	3					3
Total	18	2	0	0	2	22

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and flexible assessment
- ◆ good work placements
- ◆ good off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ unstructured on-the-job training
- ◆ lack of awareness by trainees of NVQ requirements
- ◆ inadequate induction

31. The subcontractors' assessors are experienced in hospitality work and hold, or are working towards, relevant assessors' qualifications. Some are also workplace supervisors or managers. They are flexible in their approach to visiting trainees who are working shifts and are prepared to carry out assessments in the evenings and at weekends as well as during normal working hours. The assessors are well respected by trainees and employers. The trainees' portfolios include detailed records of assessment planning, decisions and feedback. Trainees meet their assessors at least once every two weeks, when progress reviews and assessments take place. Progress reviews and subsequent action plans are good. Internal verification is carried out regularly and includes the observation of assessors making assessment decisions. The internal verification is recorded well and includes accurate and relevant feedback. However, the sample of work to be internally verified is not planned in advance.

32. Work placements are of good quality and meet NVQ requirements. Although there is currently a low retention rate, ATL's trainees are well motivated. They often attend training sessions on their days off and complete background knowledge questions at home. All the trainees interviewed indicated their

satisfaction with the work of the subcontractor and their assessors. All the employers' staff interviewed are pleased with the programme and want to have more trainees.

33. Regular off-the-job training sessions are available. The sessions are repeated to allow trainees more than one opportunity to attend. The training is satisfactory, but the aims of individual sessions are not made clear and some of the supporting written information is weak. The training resources are good. Particularly good use is made of trainees' own knowledge and experience through directed questioning to establish depth of knowledge. Trainees find the sessions useful and interesting. Regular links are made to the qualifications being studied, including key skills qualifications. Trainees employed by a major hotel chain also attend in-house training sessions, although these are not directly linked to the trainees' programmes or NVQs.

34. Employers give good on-the-job training but this is often not recorded. The training carried out is not directly linked to the occupational standards and is therefore difficult to use as evidence of trainees' progress towards the NVQ. The formal progress reviews sometimes identify gaps in training. The workplace supervisors and managers have a good understanding of the NVQ system and some are qualified assessors, but there is little training towards the NVQ in the workplace.

35. Trainees are not always aware of their NVQ requirements. Some trainees are unaware that they must complete extra units in order to have sufficient evidence to achieve their modern apprenticeship. The subcontractor is not fully aware of the modern apprenticeship requirements. One modern apprentice who is already working towards the NVQ at level 3 holds a level 2 NVQ in an occupational area not relevant to his present one. Neither Access Training nor the subcontractor had been aware of this.

36. Hospitality trainees do not have a structured induction programme. Topics such as equal opportunities and health and safety are covered in off-the-job training sessions but this may not be at the beginning of training. These sessions are not always attended by trainees at the beginning of their programme. Trainees sign and date a training agreement which includes aspects of induction. Most trainees interviewed could not recollect the content of the training agreement. When trainees begin hospitality programmes they are interviewed, for initial assessment purposes, and assessment of prior learning. These assessments are not always taken into account when completing or updating the individual training plans.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

37. ATL has an equal opportunities policy and a set of procedures, which have recently been updated to include policies on harassment and bullying. The procedures are internally audited every six months, to ensure that Access Training is fulfilling equal opportunities requirements. The administrative director has responsibility for co-ordinating equal opportunities. There is a great deal of information on equal opportunities. The company has a positive action strategy, which is part of the business plan and is reviewed monthly at management team meetings. The strategy involves monitoring the number of people who are recruited from under-represented groups to the training programmes. Access Training employs a public relations company to promote the success of its trainees' achievements, including those from minority groups. Data on applicants, participants and leavers are analysed each month to identify trends. Formal agreements with trainees, subcontractors and employers have been updated to emphasise equality of opportunity. Employers who do not have their own policy must use ATL's equal opportunities policy. Some staff have recently had training in equal opportunities matters. A new training module on equal opportunities has recently been developed for use in the induction programme. One of ATL's subcontractors is an organisation which gives training to orthodox Jewish women. There are currently two trainees on this programme. Ninety-three trainees are men and 128 are women. By providing flexible part-time training for returners to the labour market, Access Training has been successful in attracting more women into training. There are six trainees from minority ethnic groups and one person with a disability. During 1999-2000, 4 per cent of trainees starting training were from minority ethnic groups. Three per cent of trainees starting training were registered as having a disability. Inspectors identified strengths and weaknesses in addition to those in the self-assessment report but awarded the same grade as that given in the report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ strong emphasis on equality of opportunity
- ◆ thorough collection, analysis and use of data

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no monitoring of employers and subcontractors' equal opportunities practices
- ◆ insufficient training on equal opportunities in hospitality

38. ATL recognised the need to improve its position on equality of opportunity from the self-assessment process. Several actions were taken as a result. The administrative director was appointed as the person to co-ordinate development activities. A positive action strategy was developed to remove gender imbalances

and barriers to training for minority ethnic groups or people with a disability. The company has set itself targets for improvement and has stated actions to be taken in recruitment, marketing and liaison with employers. It is too early to assess the results of these measures. Local community organisations have been contacted for advice and information. Equality of opportunity has been included as a standard agenda item on management team and staff meeting agendas. In its self-assessment report, Access Training identified the need for staff to be trained and updated on equal opportunities. Four members of staff attended a one-day training event organised by the TEC to introduce them to a training module. This information was shared with all staff. The TEC's training manual was recently extended and developed into a training module for use during trainees' induction, to raise awareness of equal opportunities issues. The module has been supported by an open learning workbook to be completed in the workplace. The company's recruitment procedures state that appointments are made purely on the basis of an individual's suitability for the job, avoiding any gender or other bias. The company is keen to offer opportunities to older people and has recently employed a staff member who had taken retirement from another company. ATL's premises are accessible to people with disabilities.

39. ATL has introduced a comprehensive system to collect and analyse information on trainees' ethnicity, gender, marital status, disabilities and health conditions. This computer database system was introduced in March 2000. It allows the company to compare successful recruits with the whole group of applicants. The information is being used to ensure that there is no bias in the recruitment process and to aid management's action-planning. Information on staff recruitment is contained in the general administration records.

40. The initial vetting process for employers includes a check on their arrangements for ensuring equality of opportunity, but there is no ongoing monitoring of these arrangements. The subcontractor in hospitality has a policy which does not include any reference to harassment or bullying. Until recently, the process for reviewing trainees' progress did not include any formal monitoring of equal opportunities, although this is now included in the new progress-review procedure. Inspectors found offensive posters displayed in three workplaces. No action had been taken by Access Training to bring this to the employers' attention.

41. The company's arrangements for giving information and training in equality of opportunity do not include the trainees in hospitality, who are all working with the subcontractor. These trainees are having insufficient guidance and training on equality of opportunity.

Trainee support

Grade 3

42. Trainees are recruited from a wide area around Newcastle and Gateshead. Some applicants are referred by local careers officers or employers. Others contact Access Training as a result of recommendations from friends or families. All

applicants are given information packs and are invited for interview. Where appropriate, trainees' details are sent to prospective employers, who then invite them for interview. In-house trainees receive an induction at the training centre. Employed trainees receive an introduction to Access Training and their training programme during the first few days of their training. All trainees have an initial assessment interview. Individual training plans are completed at the beginning of their programme and a training agreement is signed. Trainees' progress is monitored regularly by the trainers/assessors. Inspectors agreed with some of the judgements in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ effective promotion of programmes to potential trainees
- ◆ wide range of additional courses and qualifications
- ◆ good pastoral support for trainees

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ inadequate initial assessment for some trainees
- ◆ ineffective use of individual training plans

43. Staff from Access Training attend local careers events and exhibitions. Prospective trainees are given information packs which include details of all the company's programmes. Open evenings allow parents and prospective trainees to obtain further information, guidance and advice. A parents' guide is issued. Trainees who are unsure which programme they wish to follow may sample each skill area through taster sessions and are given support and guidance to help them make appropriate choices. Articles giving details of opportunities and trainees' successes are displayed on the notice boards and appear in the local press.

44. In addition to the NVQ, trainees can take courses and qualifications to increase their confidence, skills and employability. All trainees are offered the opportunity to take part in courses on a range of topics such as manual handling, interview techniques and health and safety. Many employers give trainees the opportunity to attend additional in-house training.

45. Good relationships have been established between trainees, trainers/assessors and employers. A newsletter keeps trainees informed about what is happening at ATL. All trainees are allocated either a trainer/assessor or a workplace supervisor to act as a mentor. Workplace supervisors are given a guide which explains the support which they are expected to give. All trainees have regular progress reviews. In some cases the employer is involved. Many progress-review forms are incomplete. In some cases, trainees are not set short-term targets. When targets are set, they are generally undemanding. Guidance is available to assist trainees who

wish to change direction in training. One trainee changed from business administration to a hospitality programme. Help was given to the trainee in finding suitable employment and preparing for an interview. New Deal clients have been encouraged to progress into national traineeships and modern apprenticeships following the achievement of their New Deal programme objectives.

46. There is a specified initial assessment procedure, but it is not always followed. Some trainees have no more than an initial interview. Other trainees undertake a range of exercises during their induction programme, including an initial assessment of their vocational and basic skills. When this indicates a possible learning need, trainees are interviewed and their basic skills abilities are discussed. A more in-depth assessment is then given to establish the full extent of their needs. This is done by a suitably qualified member of staff. If additional support is necessary, trainees are referred to local colleges for specialist training. There are currently two trainees who are attending such college courses. Their employers are supportive and allow the trainees time off work to attend. The induction process also differs depending on the vocational area. On business administration programmes, the induction process lasts for up to three weeks. It includes written tests and observations by staff, and initial training on health and safety, equal opportunities, curriculum vitae preparation and interview techniques. On other programmes, induction is as short as half a day and covers only the minimum legal requirements.

47. Initial assessment is not taken into account when developing trainees' individual training plans. Their prior learning and achievements are not always considered or accredited. Individual training plans are not updated to take into account trainees' progress. Trainees' files contain a copy of their individual training plans, but this is updated only following a change in personal details or when the trainee decides on a change of direction in training. Individual training plans do not always record all the qualifications or units which a trainee is working towards, or their additional learning or support needs.

Management of training

Grade 3

48. ATL has a managing director and an administration director, both of whom are directly responsible to the two shareholders. The managing director has overall responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the company. There are two managers reporting to the managing director. Each has responsibility for a team of six staff. One of the teams delivers the administration programme, and the other the retailing and manufacturing programmes. The second team also contains an employer liaison officer to create and maintain links with employers and to develop work-placement and employment opportunities. The administration director manages an accounts supervisor and two part-time administration assistants. The company has a mission statement and produces an annual business plan. It subcontracts part of its work to other training organisations. The hospitality programme is subcontracted to a specialist local training provider and the accounts

programme is subcontracted to a local college. Another college of further education delivers call-centre training. Access Training was accredited with the Investors in People award in 1997 and was successfully re-accredited in March 2000. Over the past three years, the numbers of trainees have remained stable. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report, but considered others to be no more than normal practice. They agreed with the weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report and awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ open, consultative management style
- ◆ good staff development arrangements
- ◆ strong links with employers

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ ineffective measures to reduce early leavers' rate
- ◆ weak management of subcontractors

49. There is an open and consultative management style. Staff are encouraged to contribute ideas and suggestions for changes and improvements to share good practice and are involved in the business-planning process. The company has a well-structured meetings schedule. There are monthly management team and assessors and internal verifiers' meetings. Staff meetings are held twice yearly, following the management-review meetings, and are used to brief staff on corporate issues and progress towards meeting the targets and objectives stated in the business plan. Staff support the mission, aims and values of the company.

50. The company has a staff development plan, which is closely linked to the business plan, and outlines the staff training objectives for the company as a whole. In preparation for their annual staff development review, staff are asked to consider their own development needs in relation to the business plan. During reviews, realistic and achievable individual targets are set. These include both development activities to be undertaken and targets relating to trainee numbers and NVQ achievement rates. These targets are negotiated between staff and line managers. They are regularly reviewed throughout the year, and amended when necessary.

51. Staff are well qualified. They hold appropriate occupational and NVQ assessors and internal verifiers' awards. In addition, training staff hold teaching or training qualifications. The company has a programme of staff training in key skills, and most staff are working towards key skills practitioners' awards. The company's approach to key skills is effective. Trainees are made aware of the key skills requirements of their programme from the beginning of training, and start work on these at an early stage. Staff are familiar with the new key skills standards

and the assessment arrangements, including external tests. Further training on these standards is planned.

52. The employer liaison officer establishes and develops links with employers and generates work-placement and employment opportunities. Other training staff make regular visits to employers to monitor trainees' progress and develop good working relationships with workplace supervisors. Access Training has a good reputation among local employers and has longstanding working relationships with some companies, which create job opportunities for trainees. At the time of inspection, 75 per cent of trainees were employed.

53. ATL has a high proportion of early leavers from its training programmes. This is a problem throughout the TEC area. The Access Training early leavers' rates are slightly higher than the TEC average. In the 1998-99 contract year, 61 per cent of those on youth programmes left ATL's programme early without a qualification. The figure for 1999-2000 is 48 per cent. There has been some investigation by the senior management team into reasons for people leaving programmes early. Access Training has produced early leavers' figures for each occupational sector and for each programme, and has broken these down further to show the time spent on the programme before leaving. For those areas with particularly high early leavers' rates, such as the national traineeship programme in business administration, which had an early leaver rate of 70 per cent for 1999-2000, individual reasons for leaving have been recorded. However, these reasons have not been collated or fully analysed to identify trends or patterns. In its current business plan, the company has set itself a target of reducing the proportion of early leavers who do not achieve a qualification to 45 per cent. Staff are now expected to alert managers to trainees who are not progressing well, or whom they consider to be potential early leavers. Such trainees are placed on a concern list, and their situation is monitored closely. However, these arrangements are not always carried out, and records are not always well maintained. There are no procedures to evaluate the effectiveness of selection, recruitment and initial assessment processes. The arrangements focus on the prevention of current trainees leaving early, rather than ensuring that trainees are placed on the most appropriate programme in the first place.

54. ATL has recognised weaknesses in its management of subcontractors in its self-assessment report, for example, insufficient monitoring and a lack of awareness of NVQ requirements. It has taken some action to remedy the situation. It has introduced a more detailed subcontractors' agreement, which includes the right to carry out observations and inspect external verifiers' reports. The company has created closer links with the subcontractor responsible for hospitality programmes and has introduced regular meetings. It has reduced the number of colleges with which it works and has carried out some observations of training. However, subcontractors are still not managed sufficiently well. The new agreements have been signed by the subcontractors, but regular monitoring of their performance has not been carried out. The company has not managed the hospitality subcontractor sufficiently well and has failed to identify some serious weaknesses in the delivery of the modern apprenticeship framework.

Grade 3

Quality assurance

55. ATL is an approved assessment centre for the awarding body's programmes and has held ISO 9001 accreditation since 1994. The administration director is the nominated quality assurance manager and the managing director is the assistant quality assurance manager. Access Training has written quality assurance policies and procedures which have recently been revised and are internally audited on a regular basis. The new procedures concentrate on the training activities. A procedure to put into effect the self-assessment process is now included in the quality assurance manual. Quality assurance at Access Training is now based on analysis of performance through self-assessment, evaluation of feedback from trainees and action resulting from customer complaints. Managers observe course and training programme reviews and analyse the resultant data. Self-assessment has resulted in the production of action plans. A structured analysis of evidence is carried out annually and a report is produced. During periods of change, additional self-assessment has been carried out and temporary action plans drawn up. Internal verifiers and occupational assessors' meetings take place monthly. Access Training has completed an annual self-assessment since 1998 and the most recent report was completed in May 2000. The production of the self-assessment report was co-ordinated by the managing director. All members of staff were given the opportunity to make contributions, based on their experience of monitoring trainees and visiting employers. The results were incorporated into the report. The self-assessment report gives detailed information about the organisation, and the plans which are in place to build on the strengths and remedy the weaknesses which have been identified. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report and found additional weaknesses. They awarded a lower grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough self-assessment procedures
- ◆ effective system for dealing with customers' complaints

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of planning for some internal verification activities
- ◆ insufficient feedback from employers

56. ATL makes a clear commitment to quality assurance in its mission statement, which emphasises a positive approach to continuous improvement. Necessary improvements in quality are identified in the annual business plan. Regular meetings, both formal and informal, are held to discuss quality assurance issues

and relevant information is shared with all employees. Staff have a good understanding of how their personal contributions are likely to lead to improvements in the organisation as a whole.

57. The action plans drawn up as a result of internal auditing and self-assessment build on the strengths identified and suggest remedies for the weaknesses. It is planned to have more staff input to the self-assessment process and to introduce quality-related staff questionnaires. Relevant procedures are added to the quality assurance manual as changes are introduced and more staff are involved in the auditing and reporting processes. Good practice is shared through internal verification standardisation meetings, assessors' meetings and course-review groups. The four internal verifiers meet monthly to agree internal verifiers' duties and make recommendations to improve the process. All internal verification decisions are conveyed to assessors at monthly meetings. All aspects of internal verification are accurately recorded to meet the awarding body's requirements. Assessors' meetings are scheduled to take place monthly and have previously been conducted on a casual basis. Meetings now have structured agendas. Matters requiring future action and further discussion at senior management level are recorded. A list of trainees who are experiencing difficulties in meeting NVQ requirements is a standing agenda item. Course-review groups meet annually, led by a member of the management team. A cross-section of trainees is invited to attend and to comment on the quality of training. Apart from more informal in-house contacts during training there is no other structured method of gaining feedback.

58. There is an effective system to deal with customers' complaints. All complaints are recorded and corrective actions taken. There are several examples of successful outcomes as a result of the system. Some trainees have complained of harassment at work and other problems related to training. All complaints have received attention and have been resolved. One employer indicated dissatisfaction on a feedback questionnaire and the problem was rapidly resolved. The company is still using Access Training as its approved training provider.

59. The new quality assurance procedures, designed to improve previous arrangements, have only recently been introduced. It is not possible to evaluate their impact on training and assessment and the control of subcontractors at this stage, but the new arrangements do not give sufficient guidance on matters such as conducting reviews and initial assessments. As a result, there is a lack of standardisation in the way that these and other procedures are carried out.

60. Internal verification paperwork is accurately completed and visits to employers are conducted on a regular basis. However, some internal verification procedures are not planned effectively. For example, the sampling procedures for trainees' interviews and assessors' observations are not thorough enough. In many cases the feedback to assessors is not recorded.

61. Feedback from employers has not been collected effectively. Although questionnaires are issued to all employers, only 17 per cent responded to the most

recent one. Many of the feedback comments are made by assessors and then signed by workplace supervisors.

62. The most recent self-assessment report produced by Access Training is well presented and gives detailed information on the training activities. Judgements are supported by evidence and there is a comprehensive action plan, which identifies responsibilities and target achievement dates to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses. All staff are now contributing to self-assessment.