

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Apprenticeship Training Limited**

12 November 2001



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learnirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

## Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.



## SUMMARY

### The provider

Apprenticeship Training Limited is a private limited company based in Southampton. It provides training in Hampshire, Surrey and parts of south London. It provides work-based learning for young people in the occupational area of construction, including training in electrical installation, gas and mechanical services, and plumbing. Apprenticeship Training Limited's learners are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) and foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Work-based learning for young people is satisfactory overall. More specifically, work-based learning in electrical installation and plumbing is satisfactory and work-based learning in gas and mechanical services is good. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Equal opportunities is satisfactory but quality assurance is unsatisfactory.

### GRADES

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

Construction	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- clearly defined strategic objectives
- open and consultative style of management
- good support for learners including learners with disabilities
- good facilities for off-the-job training
- good work placements

### **KEY WEAKNESSES**

- inadequate use of management information to improve performance
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- failure to apply systems and procedures for assuring quality
- poor progress reviews
- slow rate of achievement of NVQs
- late introduction of training in key skills in learners' training programmes

### **OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more appropriate contractual arrangements with subcontractors
- more comprehensive initial assessments
- regular staff appraisals
- thorough analysis of data on equal opportunities
- more frequent updating of policies and procedures
- more stimulating training in theory

## THE INSPECTION

1. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 30 days at ATL during November 2001. They interviewed 68 learners and carried out 25 interviews with employers and workplace supervisors and 21 interviews with ATL's staff. They visited 20 work placements. Inspectors observed and graded six lessons. They examined learners' portfolios of evidence, policies and procedures, the awarding body's reports, minutes of meetings, internal verifier's files and other management papers. Inspectors studied ATL's self-assessment report, which was produced in September 2001.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>

## THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

### Context

2. Apprenticeship Training Limited (ATL) was established in 1992. Its original purpose was to provide training for the electrical industry. Now, however, it also provides training in plumbing and gas and mechanical services. In 1999, ATL moved to larger premises in Southampton, where it has a workshop, classrooms and an office. The company contracts with Surrey, London South and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). It also provides training on a commercial basis. The inspection did not cover ATL's commercial training. Most of the off-the-job training takes place at ATL's premises but ATL also subcontracts with 20 colleges of further education. Learners attend college on day or block release. Learners who attend college on block release normally do so for four days each month. ATL has 11 full-time staff and one part-time member of staff. Currently, the company has 210 learners, who work for approximately 75 employers.

3. The buoyant economy of the Southeast, and especially London, puts the construction industry's services much in demand. The construction industry's national training board predicts that demand for plumbers, electricians and maintenance engineers will grow by between 0.6 and 0.8 per cent between 2001 and 2005. It estimates that the industry needs to recruit 64,000 people each year to maintain the size of its current workforce and 74,000 to allow for a modest growth. In June 2001, the rate of unemployment in the Southeast was 1.5 per cent, compared with a national average of 2.9 per cent. Of those who were unemployed, 20.5 per cent were aged 18 to 24, compared with a national average of 24.4 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, minority ethnic groups comprised 20.2 per cent of London's population and 3.1 per cent of the population of the Southeast. In the areas served by Surrey, Hampshire and London South LSCs, the proportion of school leavers gaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above in 2001 ranged from 45 per cent in London to 58 per cent in Surrey, compared with a national average of 50 per cent.



### **Work-based learning for young people**

4. Retention rates are good in plumbing and in gas and mechanical services. The rate of retention is good among foundation modern apprentices in electrical installation, but only satisfactory for the advanced modern apprentices. The achievement rate of NVQs in all three programmes is slow. There is insufficient data to make judgements on the achievement rates of full modern apprenticeship frameworks.

5. Learners are in good work placements, where they have the opportunity to work in different departments and gain a wide range of skills and experience. They are given good support by employers, and by ATL's staff. The portfolio evidence of electrical installation learners is good, but that of plumbing learners is not clearly cross-referenced. Training in the workplace is not linked closely enough to training off the job. Key skills training is started too late in some learners' programmes and evidence from the NVQs is not always used to show learners' acquisition of key skills. Individual learning plans are not updated regularly enough. The progress review process is poor.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

6. ATL has three directors. The training director is responsible for all aspects of the company's management. In addition to the training director, ATL employs a business development adviser, two training advisers, four trainer/assessors, a co-ordinator with responsibility for key skills, learning support and quality assurance, a technician, and an administrator, all of whom work full time. A part-time member of staff is responsible for health and safety. In addition, ATL uses self-employed professionals to carry out internal verification and other activities. In November 2000, ATL was accredited with the Investor in People Standard, an award which recognises the effective development of staff to improve performance. The company has procedures to assure quality and an equal opportunities policy. ATL has been carrying out self-assessment since 1998. It produced its fourth self-assessment report in preparation for the inspection.

### STRENGTHS

- clearly defined strategic objectives
- open and consultative style of management
- good use of external links
- good support for learners with disabilities
- effective process for recruiting learners
- accurate self-assessment report

### WEAKNESSES

- insufficient information for employers
- inadequate use of management information to improve performance
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities
- failure to apply systems and procedures for assuring quality
- ineffective monitoring and use of action plans and targets
- inadequate monitoring of training at the training centre and at college

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more appropriate contractual arrangements with subcontractors
- comprehensive initial assessments
- regular staff appraisals
- thorough analysis of data on equal opportunities
- more frequent updating of policies and procedures
- better use of feedback from learners and employers

7. ATL's business plan sets out clear strategic objectives for the next five years, together

with short-term goals and associated risks. ATL sets its training advisers targets for recruiting learners and arranging work placements. The training director meets with the training advisers each month to review their progress against the targets. Other staff do not have clear, measurable targets. ATL's management is open and consultative. All staff share the same office, where they frequently exchange information. ATL holds regular meetings for staff and encourages them to contribute. There are trainer/assessors' meetings and meetings of all staff. All those who attend take notes but formal minutes are not always taken. Although staff carry out actions which are agreed on at the meetings, they do not keep records of this.

8. There are good links with various organisations concerned with building engineering services. These range from organisations which develop qualifications to groups which represent employers. ATL also has strong links with individual employers in the three regions in which it operates. These employers help the company to arrange work placements which give learners opportunities to gather the evidence they need to obtain their qualifications. However, many employers do not fully understand the requirements of apprenticeships, including the role of key skills. Some workplace supervisors are unclear about the content of their learners' NVQs and rely on the learners to tell them which activities they need to carry out to achieve their qualifications. ATL does not provide an information pack for employers, although it plans to do so.

9. ATL keeps computerised records of learners' personal details, as part of its comprehensive monitoring of recruitment. However, it does not store data on retention and achievement in an easily retrievable format or use these data to guide improvements. This weakness was identified by the Training Standards Council at ATL's last inspection in July 1998. ATL also identified the weakness in its most recent self-assessment report. The company is developing a database to record learners' progress but has not yet started to use it because of staff changes. ATL plans to start using the database soon, when a new member of staff starts work.

10. Most of the off-the-job training is provided by ATL, but it arranges for learners to attend further education colleges when appropriate. The college which takes the largest number of learners has agreed a contract which is tailored to ATL's requirements. This enables ATL to influence the training which learners at that college receive. However, the company has accepted the standard terms and conditions of the other subcontracted colleges. This has reduced ATL's ability to influence training at those colleges. It has also made it harder for ATL to keep its information about the quality of the training up to date.

11. ATL carries out an initial assessment of learners' numerical skills. The company specifies an acceptable score in this assessment for learners entering its training programmes. However, it will admit some applicants with lower scores if they are willing to receive additional support. The additional support is inadequate. It involves issuing learners with workbooks to complete at their own pace. It is not clear who is responsible for monitoring the learners' progress. There is no initial assessment of

learners' communication skills. ATL has recently appointed a new member of staff, who will have the task of rectifying these weaknesses.

12. ATL aims to appraise its staff annually but the appraisals are not taking place on schedule. The company plans to rectify this by appointing a deputy training director, who will take over responsibility for appraisals. ATL does not use appraisals to set targets for staff or to guide decisions about staff training and development.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

13. ATL is supportive towards learners. Staff deal with learners' problems promptly. The company provides appropriate support for learners with specific needs. For example, there is good access to the company's training rooms for learners with mobility difficulties. ATL works closely with employers to arrange suitable transport and accommodation for learners who live at a distance from the training centre. ATL's staff also liaise with learners' parents.

14. There are clear policies and procedures to promote equal opportunities. These cover discrimination and sexual and racial harassment. There is also a procedure for dealing with grievances. ATL has recently revised its policies. A copy of the equal opportunities policy is displayed on the notice board in ATL's training centre and all the current policies are available on request. However, learners do not fully understand how equal opportunities applies to them in the training centre and at their workplaces. Learners' inductions cover equal opportunities issues and the policy. However, the checklist used during inductions does not refer to learners' understanding of equal opportunities. Learners' progress reviews do not reinforce equal opportunities. This means that an opportunity to involve employers in promoting equal opportunities is missed. ATL does not give copies of its equal opportunities policy and procedures to subcontractors or employers. The company has no system for checking that employers and subcontractors have equal opportunities policies before placing learners with them. ATL does not cover equal opportunities at its team meetings. Although the company has adopted the local LSCs' targets for participation by learners with disabilities and learners from minority ethnic groups, it has not yet devised a strategy for meeting the targets.

15. Data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disabilities is not thoroughly monitored or used to guide decisions. Although some promotional literature refers to the company's commitment to equal opportunities, ATL does not market its services specifically to under-represented groups. The notice boards in ATL's training centre do not contain literature portraying the construction industry as committed to equal opportunities. Two of ATL's staff have recently attended a day's course to raise their awareness of different cultures. Although ATL is planning further staff training, many training staff have not yet attended this course.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 4**

16. ATL has a quality assurance policy which is appropriate for an organisation of its nature. It has a mission statement and a statement of quality, which reflect its intention to achieve the aims of the quality assurance policy. Although there are well-designed systems and procedures to assure quality, only some of these are currently applied. For example, the company has effective recruitment procedures, which have resulted in a low proportion of early leavers. There are written procedures for dealing with applications for training, for recording enquiries and their outcomes on a computerised database, for initial testing of learners and for interpreting the results of the tests, for arranging interviews and for accepting learners onto training programmes. ATL applies its recruitment procedures consistently across all areas of training. Learners, staff and employers understand the procedures well.

17. Although ATL has produced an accurate self-assessment report and devised comprehensive policies and procedures to assure quality, the company gives a low priority to quality assurance. ATL fails to apply most of its systems and procedures. For example, the company has a thorough procedure and clear paperwork for internal auditing but only two of 22 scheduled audits have taken place and there has been no audit since 1999. ATL has not followed up the recommendations of the two audits. The company has established procedures for assessment and internal verification in each area of learning but does not always follow them. Some assessors are unaware of the procedures. Internal verifiers normally sample 10 per cent of assessments but this proportion varies across the areas of learning. Assessors in gas and mechanical services meet regularly to discuss individual learners and assessment generally. These meetings are focused and productive. However, the other areas of learning are smaller and their staff do not meet regularly.

18. ATL does not monitor training adequately or set targets and plan actions to improve it. The action plans which accompany ATL's earlier self-assessment reports lack precise targets. The company lacks a system for monitoring progress in carrying out its action plans and it has not reviewed its progress at the scheduled times. There is no action plan to accompany the most recent self-assessment report, as ATL intends to produce a single action plan which takes into account the findings of the inspection. Learners are rarely set clear targets during their progress reviews. The targets which are set are easy to achieve. ATL does not thoroughly monitor learners' rates of retention and achievement. The company holds data only for the period since the last Training Standards Council inspection in July 1998. ATL records individual learners' reasons for leaving but does not analyse the information or use it to increase the proportion of learners who complete their training. The company does not adequately monitor the training which takes place away from the workplace. It does not have systems for observing its own trainers or monitoring the training which takes place at the subcontracted further education colleges. It does not review or evaluate the colleges' arrangements for assuring quality. As a result, ATL fails to anticipate problems with the subcontracted training. Staff from ATL do not attend or receive the minutes of meetings which take place at the colleges to review the colleges' training programmes and evaluate their quality.

19. Learners know how to appeal against assessors' decisions, although there had not been any appeals by the time of the inspection. ATL keeps records of learners' complaints and deals with them effectively and promptly, often without resorting to written procedures. Most of the company's quality assurance policies and procedures have not been updated since 1999, although the company plans to update them regularly once it appoints a new member of staff. The company has carried out surveys of learners and employers but has not analysed or distributed the results. ATL produced its fourth self-assessment report in September 2001, in preparation for the inspection. The report follows the format of the 'Common Inspection Framework'. It is evaluative and it accurately identifies the company's strengths and weaknesses. Inspectors agreed with the self-assessment report's overall grade for construction.

**Good Practice**

*Two learners in gas and mechanical services with specific learning difficulties received one-to-one support from ATL. Both learners achieved their qualifications.*

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	210	3

20. There are 133 learners in electrical installation. Eighty-six are advanced modern apprentices, 39 are foundation modern apprentices and eight are on other programmes of work-based learning for young people. All the learners are employed. The advanced modern apprentices are working towards key skills awards and NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in electrical installation. Most learners take four years to achieve the advanced modern apprenticeship. The foundation modern apprentices are working towards key skills awards and NVQs at level 2. The young people on other programmes of work-based learning are working towards NVQs at level 2. All the learners are also working towards additional awards in electrical installation and some are working towards additional tests set by the electrical installation industry. ATL introduced training in key skills in 2000-01. ATL provides some of the off-the-job training at its training centre but subcontracts approximately 85 per cent of the training to various colleges in London, Surrey and Hampshire. ATL and staff at the colleges monitor the quality of the training. Learners attend the training centre or their college for one day each week or on a block-release basis. Learners' employers provide training in the workplace. ATL assesses learners' competence by observing them in the workplace and assessing their logbooks and portfolios of evidence. The company internally verifies the assessors' decisions. Some learners are recruited directly by their employers. Others are recruited by ATL, which then matches them to employers. ATL interviews applicants and tests their numeracy to assess their suitability for employment in construction and to identify the most appropriate level of qualification for them to take. It uses the test of applicants' numeracy to identify any needs for additional help.

21. ATL has 45 learners in gas services, heating and ventilation, and refrigeration and air conditioning. Twenty-three are advanced modern apprentices, nine are foundation modern apprentices and 13 are working towards NVQs. Twenty-five of the learners are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in gas services installation and maintenance. Most of these learners were recruited after approaching ATL directly. The learners attend ATL's training centre in Southampton on a day-release or block-release basis. The remaining learners are working towards foundation modern apprenticeships and NVQs at level 2. Seven are working towards NVQs in heating and ventilation installation, five towards NVQs in maintenance of heating and ventilation systems, and eight towards NVQs in small commercial refrigeration and air conditioning. These learners attend colleges of further education. All the learners are employed. Between them, they work for more than 20 different employers. All the employers are based in Surrey, Hampshire and London but learners work at sites both within and beyond these areas. ATL employs three full-time trainers in gas and mechanical services, all of whom

**APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING LIMITED**

are qualified assessors, and a workshop assistant. It also hires part-time trainers and assessors when necessary. Progress reviews at the early stages of learners' training are carried out by staff who are not occupationally qualified. However, later progress reviews are carried out in the workplace by occupationally qualified staff. ATL also offers training in this area of learning on a commercial basis and is a regional assessment centre for a qualification in gas-fitting.

22. There are currently 32 learners in plumbing. Eleven are advanced modern apprentices, 15 are foundation modern apprentices, five are working towards NVOs at level 3 and one is working towards an NVO at level 2. All the learners are employed and work for various plumbing, mechanical services and maintenance companies. Learners are recruited by their employers or by ATL. Applicants must attend an interview with ATL's staff and pass tests in numeracy and perception of colour. Learners who apply directly to ATL are carefully matched with potential employers. Learners must attend an employer's interview and start employment before they begin their training. ATL uses the results of learners' aptitude tests and interviews to identify the most appropriate training programmes for them. The company subcontracts the training of seven learners to six colleges. The other learners attend ATL's training centre. Learners attend college or the training centre on a day-release basis. Learners receive a comprehensive induction at college or the training centre and from their employers. ATL employs three trainers in plumbing and hires additional part-time staff when necessary. The trainers are qualified assessors with industrial experience. ATL internally verifies the assessors' work.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

<b>Work-based learning for young people</b>										
<b>Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)</b>	<b>1997-98</b>		<b>1998-99</b>		<b>1999-2000</b>		<b>2000-01</b>		<b>2001-02</b>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started			3		3		15		46
Still in training			2	67	1	33	14	93	46	100
FMA framework completed			1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVO level 2 completed			1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			1	33	2	67	0	0	0	0



Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			41		50		50		19	
Still in training	9	100	16	39	32	64	44	88	19	100
AMA framework completed			2	5	1	2	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			16	39	3	6	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed			4	10	2	4	0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework			20	49	16	32	6	12	0	0

NVQ Training										
NVQ Training										
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started			7		7		9		8	
Still in training	2	100	1	14	6	86	8	89	7	88
Individual learning plan completed			1	14	0	0	1	11	0	0
Left without completing individual learning plan			5	71	1	14	0	0	1	12
NVQ level 1 completed			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed			1	14	0	0	0	0	0	0

## STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- good facilities for off-the-job training
- good work placements
- high rates of retention

## WEAKNESSES

- poor progress reviews
- insufficient integration of on- and off-the-job training
- slow rate of achievement of NVQs
- late introduction of training in key skills in learners' training programmes

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of learners' progress
- accreditation of prior achievements in key skills
- more stimulating training in theory

23. The inspection of training in construction covered training in electrical installation, gas and mechanical services and plumbing. Outlined below are the findings for each of the three areas inspected.

### Electrical installation

24. The electrical installation provision is satisfactory. The main strengths of the provision are supportive employers, strong relationships with colleges and comprehensive evidence portfolios. The main weaknesses include inadequate progress reviews, insufficient integration of on- and off-the-job training, and the slow rate of NVQ achievement. The provision would benefit also from better motivation among learners, improved completion of assessors' awards and better recording of learners' progress.

25. Employers are supportive towards electrical installation learners and they have good relationships with ATL. Many seek ATL's advice about how to provide work-based learning in electrical installation. ATL also has good relationships with the subcontracted colleges. This contributes to the effectiveness of the progress reviews which take place at college. However, the colleges provide training in theory only. As a result, some electrical installation learners have lacked practical experience to reinforce their understanding of theory. ATL has negotiated changes to the training which takes place at one college which is responsible for a large number of electrical installation learners. For example, the learners now receive more training towards the second part of their additional qualification, which they find more difficult than the first.

26. The portfolios of the learners in electrical installation are well organised and up to date. The learners produce their portfolios with the help of ATL's assessors. The portfolios include photographs of learners' work, sales literature, employers' documents and certificates for any additional qualifications gained.

27. Reviews of electrical installation learners' progress are weak. Each learner has two progress reviews each year at college or the training centre. Further reviews take place at the sites where learners work. Many of the reviews which take place on site are not arranged in advance. This prevents employers and learners from preparing for them. It is difficult to arrange on-site progress reviews in advance because many learners do not work at a fixed site. ATL can arrange visits by telephoning employers at the start of the week. However, these arrangements often have to be cancelled when learners move to new sites. As a result, learners are having fewer progress reviews than their apprenticeship framework require. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment

report. Learners receive satisfactory oral feedback at their progress reviews but do not receive adequate written feedback. The feedback does not motivate learners or include advice about improving their performance. The paperwork associated with progress reviews contains few comments from employers, assessors or workplace supervisors. Learners are rarely set targets at their progress reviews. When targets are set, they are often imprecise and undemanding.

28. On-the-job and off-the-job training are not sufficiently linked for electrical installation learners. ATL does not advise employers how to provide training which meets the requirements of learners' NVQs. Nor does it ensure that workplace supervisors understand the requirements of the NVQs and have the appropriate skills to provide training and produce witness testimony. Employers do not know what training the colleges are providing or when it is taking place.

29. The retention rate of foundation modern apprentices is good, at 97 per cent. At 64 per cent, the rate of retention among advanced modern apprentices is satisfactory. Only 54 per cent of learners on NVQ training programmes remain in training but learners on these training programmes account for only 6 per cent of all learners. There was insufficient data for inspectors to judge learners' rates of achievement. However, learners have been slow to achieve their NVQs. Only 40 per cent of the advanced modern apprentices who started training in 1998 have achieved level 2 NVQs. Only one out of 13 learners who started NVQ training programmes in 1998 has achieved a level 2 NVQ. ATL does not set demanding targets for its learners. Nor does it set higher targets for its more able learners. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report.

30. Many electrical installation learners are unsure about the requirements of their apprenticeships. Learners' motivation is poor, with high rates of absence and lateness at college. Learners do not take responsibility for completing their training. There is one assessor in electrical installation, who has worked for ATL for eight months. This assessor has not completed his assessors' award. ATL does not adequately monitor learners' progress. Although the company uses progress reviews to monitor progress towards NVQs, it does not hold sufficient data to assess individual learners' progress in relation to others in their group or in relation to similar learners nationally.

#### Gas and mechanical services

31. The provision in gas and mechanical services is good. The main strengths of the provision are a comprehensive induction process, good off-the-job training facilities and work placements, high retention rates and effective support for learners. Weaknesses include a lack of targets in individual learning plans and a failure to integrate key skills training with occupational training. The provision would benefit also from the accreditation of learners' prior achievements in key skills and from learners making faster progress towards achieving their desired qualification.

32. ATL uses interviews and comprehensive tests to select gas and mechanical services

learners and arranges for successful applicants to attend interviews with employers. It selects employers mainly for their trades and their locations. Employers provide successful applicants with appropriate protective clothing and equipment. Some employers also give new learners a basic kit of tools. When gas and mechanical services learners start work, their workplace supervisors give them comprehensive guidance on health and safety and information about their workplaces. They also advise them about appropriate behaviour when working at occupied premises. In addition, learners receive thorough training in health and safety when they start their training at college or at the training centre. This training contributes towards their NVQs. Learners receive good induction packs from ATL and most learners receive comprehensive packs from their employers. The packs contain appropriate information, which is reinforced during training and reviews of learners' progress.

33. Over the past two years, ATL has established a gas training centre at its new premises. The training centre has up-to-date equipment, some of which has been provided through sponsorship from manufacturers. The workshops are appropriate for training and staff arrange learners' timetables carefully so that learners have adequate facilities to work efficiently and safely. ATL has recently established a computer suite for learners to develop their IT skills. The company selects its subcontractors carefully. The subcontracted colleges have good facilities for training and ATL maintains close contact with their teaching staff to ensure that gas and mechanical services learners are making good progress.

34. Gas and mechanical services learners work with occupationally competent staff and receive good training at a wide variety of sites. Many of the staff have recently completed training themselves and therefore understand the requirement for learners to gather evidence for their portfolios from the workplace. Most workplace supervisors give learners good support and encourage them to practise tasks which they have learned at college. Some learners benefit from having mentors in the workplace. These learners are clear how to take up any difficulties which arise at work. When learners lack experience which they need to achieve their NVQs, their employers arrange for them to work in areas which will give them the experience they require.

35. Early reviews of the progress gas and mechanical services learners are making, focus on health and safety and pastoral matters. Staff at the subcontracted colleges write reports for consideration at these progress reviews. Learners sign records of their progress reviews and ATL forwards copies to their employers. The staff who carry out progress reviews visit learners regularly at their workplaces and at college. Learners find these staff approachable and can contact them by mobile telephone. Training staff respond promptly when learners raise queries. However, ATL's staff do not always set targets for learners during their progress reviews. As a result, learners lack encouragement to achieve their qualifications within the agreed time.

36. Over the past four years, the proportion of learners in gas services who have remained in training has been above average, at 78 per cent. The proportion of learners

in heating and ventilation and in refrigeration and air conditioning who have remained in training has been high, at 82 per cent. There is insufficient data to judge learners' achievement rates. However, few learners have achieved their apprenticeships and ATL has not made any arrangements to recognise learners' completion of units towards their NVQs. Individual learning plans do not include target dates for learners to achieve their apprenticeships and are not updated to reflect learners' progress.

37. ATL introduced training in key skills for the first time in 2001-02. This means that gas and mechanical services learners in the second and third years of their training programmes have only recently started training in key skills. Many of these learners resent this addition to their work. Learners are not encouraged to gather evidence towards their key skills awards from their workplaces or during their occupational training. ATL is using a single large construction project at its training centre for key skills training and assessment. This project does not overlap with learners' other activities. Some of the subcontracted colleges are teaching key skills entirely separately from occupational skills and many learners do not understand the relevance of key skills to their occupational training. Some learners have already achieved qualifications which are equivalent to key skills awards but ATL has not accredited their learning in order to exempt them from external tests.

#### Plumbing

38. The plumbing provision is satisfactory. The main strengths of the provision are good learner support, a wide range of on-site training opportunities and high retention rates. Weaknesses include slow progress by some learners in achieving their NVQs, poor progress reviews and the late introduction of key skills training into the training programmes. The provision would also benefit from better cross-referencing of evidence in portfolios, development of the workshop, and more stimulating training in the theoretical aspects of the programme.

39. Learners in plumbing receive good support. When they need additional help with their assignments or with gathering evidence for their portfolios, ATL's staff meet them to provide this. These meetings take place at work or at the training centre or at another convenient location. ATL's staff have good relationships with learners, employers and tutors at the subcontracted colleges. When employers and learners seek technical information from ATL, they receive prompt advice. Employers are supportive of the training and take a close interest in learners' welfare and progress.

40. Learners in plumbing work alongside experienced and qualified plumbers, who spend time helping them to develop their skills. Most learners work on a range of projects and acquire good practical skills and experience. Employers arrange for learners to develop the various skills they need in an appropriate sequence. They also ensure that learners are able to provide good work-based evidence.

41. At 88 per cent, the proportion of learners in plumbing who have remained in training is high. There are insufficient data to judge learners' rates of achievement. The

self-assessment report identified that some learners have been slow to achieve their qualifications. For example, three learners are in their sixth year of training but have not yet achieved their NVQs. One learner, who is in the fifth year of training, has only recently started to collect evidence for the level 3 NVQ.

42. Progress reviews for learners in plumbing are poor. Most learners know how long their training programmes are and which overall qualifications they are working towards. However, they are unclear about their short-term targets. Progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on learners' progress towards their NVQs. Learners are rarely set precise and demanding targets to achieve before their next progress review. The lack of short-term targets makes it difficult for employers to identify appropriate tasks for learners to practise at work. Each year, learners have two reviews at ATL's training centre or their college. These reviews involve learners' trainers or college tutors. All the other progress reviews take place in the workplace and involve learners' workplace supervisors or managers. One of ATL's assessors, who carries out assessments in plumbing in the workplace, carries out most of these progress reviews. Tutors at the subcontracted colleges receive little information about the reviews. Progress reviews do not take place sufficiently frequently. Some learners in plumbing have experienced gaps of up to five months between progress reviews. The self-assessment report identified this weakness. Employers receive records of learners' progress reviews. Although ATL expects employers to forward copies of the records to learners, this rarely happens. ATL does use progress reviews to update learners' individual learning plans.

43. Until recently, learners in plumbing at ATL's training centre and at some of the subcontracted colleges received no training in key skills. All learners now receive training in key skills from the first year of their training programmes. However, ATL does not integrate this training with learners' occupational training. Some learners' GCSE results exempt them from various external assessments of their key skills. However, ATL has not recorded this on their individual learning plans or ensured that the target dates for these learners to achieve their key skills awards fall within the period for which their exemption is valid. These learners have to follow the same training programme as other learners.

44. The portfolios of evidence maintained by learners in plumbing contain a wide range of appropriate evidence, including witness testimony, logbooks of their activities in the workplace, photographs of their work, records of assessments of their performance at tasks in the workplace and simulated exercises, and written answers to questions on theoretical aspects of the programme. However, the evidence is not cross-referenced to the standards of learners' qualifications. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. ATL is upgrading its facilities for practical training, which means that learners have still to complete some of their projects and simulated exercises. Some theory lessons fail to interest and motivate learners.

### Good Practice

*During an introductory lesson on condensing boilers, the trainer provided clear handouts and explained how the boilers work. The trainer skilfully related learners' own experiences to the material he was teaching. For example, he likened the condensed water in the boiler to condensation on the windows of occupied cars and the dangers from waste gases to the dangers from car exhaust.*

### Poor Practice

*During one lesson in theory, learners in plumbing needed to use calculators. Many learners did not have calculators and there were no spare calculators at the training centre. These learners copied down the results and the trainer was unable to check that they understood the calculations.*