

INSPECTION REPORT

Achievement Training Limited

10 June 2002



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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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
- **learndirect** provision
- adult and community learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of her majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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 Jobcentre Plus programmes 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

Achievement Training Limited is a private training organisation. It was established in July 1996 and is based on one site in the centre of Plymouth. The contract with Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council to provide work-based learning for young people has been in effect since April 2001. There are 67 learners, 52 of whom are in health, social care and public services training programmes. The remaining 15 learners are on technology, business administration, customer service or beauty therapy training programmes and these were not graded at inspection because of the small numbers on them.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Provision in health, social care and public services is good. Leadership and management and the promotion of equality of opportunity are good and quality assurance is satisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	2
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	3

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- effective and open style of management
- strong and effective links with employers and external agencies
- strong support for staff development
- effective action to ensure continuous improvement
- good promotion of equal opportunities
- good support for learners
- good key skills training as an integral part of programmes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient focus of strategic planning on work-based learning contracts
- insufficient collection and analysis of employers' and learners' feedback

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of six inspectors spent a total of 24 days at Achievement Training Limited (ATL) in June 2002. The inspectors studied the most recent development plan and self-assessment report, produced in May 2002. The inspectors interviewed 27 learners and held 40 interviews with staff. Four teaching sessions were observed, including equal opportunities training for learners from all training programmes. The inspectors visited 14 work placements and interviewed 14 employers, where they looked at a range of documentary evidence related to the learners, including learners' files, assessment records, learning materials and portfolios. They also studied ATL's policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, internal and external verification reports, and other relevant paperwork.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Health, social care & public services	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. ATL is a private training organisation which was established in July 1996. There are two directors, 43 full-time and six part-time staff. The company holds the Investors in People award, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. It is located at one site in the centre of Plymouth, where the training centre is based on four floors, three of which are accessible by lift. Since April 2001, the company has held contracts with Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to provide work-based learning for young people. These contracts account for only 8 per cent of ATL's training activity. The original contract was for provision of work-based learning for 30 learners, but an increase of over 100 per cent has been agreed subsequently. At the time of the inspection, there were 67 learners on training programmes, including six advanced modern apprentices employed by ATL.

3. In October 2001, the unemployment rate in Plymouth was 3 per cent, compared with 2 per cent in the Southwest and 2.9 per cent nationally. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Plymouth achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 50 per cent, compared with 51 per cent in Devon, 53 per cent in Cornwall and 47.9 per cent nationally. The proportion of persons from minority ethnic groups in the respective populations of Devon and Cornwall is less than 1 per cent, and the number of learners from these groups on ATL's programmes is correspondingly low.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Learners recruited onto work-based learning programmes have not yet reached their completion date and retention or achievement data were not available. The inspection team concluded that the learners are making satisfactory progress and are on schedule to complete their training programmes within the contract period.

5. Inspection covered training in the occupational area of health, care and public services. ATL provides training for foundation and modern apprentices and for learners on national vocational qualification (NVQ) programmes. Training is good. Learners receive good support from staff who are well motivated and work together flexibly as a team. Through good teamwork, they ensure that key skills training is introduced early in the training programmes, key skills materials are relevant and key skills assessment is integral to the NVQ assessment process.

7. ATL has encountered difficulties in providing training for learners on care training programmes partly because employers are unable to release the learners each week owing to shift work arrangements. The early years care team holds weekly learning sessions at ATL's training centre, but most of the training received by the learners in care is in the workplace.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

8. ATL has two directors, one of whom is responsible for equal opportunities, the other for quality assurance. There are 43 full-time and six part-time staff employed by the company and four contract trainers. All modern apprentices are employed, most with local companies, although six are employed by ATL. The company has gained a number of awards, including the Investors in People award, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. The company has equal opportunities and quality assurance policies, with a range of procedures to support them. The quality assurance procedures for work-based learning are still being developed. Self-assessment reports have been produced annually since 1998, and the most recent report was updated in May 2002.

STRENGTHS

- effective and open style of management
- strong and effective links with employers and external agencies
- strong support for staff development
- effective action to ensure continuous improvement
- good self-assessment process
- effective resolution of equal opportunities issues
- effective measures to raise staff awareness of equal opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient focus of strategic planning on work-based learning contracts
- stereotypical images in promotional material
- incomplete quality assurance arrangements
- insufficient collection and analysis of employers' and learners' feedback

9. ATL has an open and consultative style of management and a very low staff turnover ratio, with only six staff leaving within the past two years. Staff are well supported by the directors who meet regularly and formally with co-ordinators. In addition, the directors meet staff informally, usually each day. Staff value this contact and appreciate the support the directors give them. Working conditions are flexible and take into account the personal circumstances of staff. Curriculum teams meet formally and the minutes and action plans are reviewed and monitored by the directors. Additionally, various working groups have been set up, for example, for key skills training and equal opportunities training and all staff are encouraged to join and contribute to discussions and developments. Several staff have been recruited from the various training programmes offered by ATL. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

10. There are strong and effective links with employers and a variety of external

agencies. Staff ensure that unemployed learners are matched appropriately and quickly to good employers and there are high retention rates in the workplace. When learners do leave work placements, they are placed quickly with alternative employers. The company has excellent links with the local college of further education, which provides learners with access to their library and other resources. Links with local schools provide good work-placement opportunities for business administration modern apprentices, and several have been offered employment. Through its partnership with a consortium of local schools, ATL provides a training programme for students aged 14 to 18. This has been used successfully to give students vocational training and work placements, and they have the opportunity to progress to modern apprenticeships. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

11. ATL gives strong support to staff development and has a well-established staff appraisal process, which the directors monitor. All staff are appraised annually by line managers who, in turn, are appraised by the directors. Staff have received training in appraisal techniques within the past two years and the processes and paperwork are clear and readily available in the quality assurance manual and the comprehensive staff handbook. ATL provides training towards assessors' and verifiers' qualifications and 12 staff are working towards a key skills practitioner award. Staff can apply for training independently of the appraisal process. The company provides both financial subsidy and time allowance for training, including training identified to meet personal needs. New staff are given a training needs analysis within the induction period and the appropriate training is arranged quickly. There is a comprehensive staff development database which is used effectively by the directors to monitor the training programme. ATL did not recognise this database as a strength in its most recent self-assessment report.

12. ATL identified a weakness in the strategic planning of its work-based learning contracts and the inspectors agreed. Since April 2001, ATL has received a small contract for work-based learning, which represents only 8 per cent of all its work. While the company has a strategic plan for the development of its training provision, it fails to focus sufficiently on the area of work-based learning. Although ATL has made significant progress towards meeting the requirements of their contracts for work-based learning, there are no specific targets, for example for retention and achievement rates. Many of the procedures relate to the whole training provision. Some quality assurance systems have yet to be established. In order to improve the effectiveness of the management team, the management structure is being reviewed.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 2**

13. Equal opportunities at ATL is the responsibility of a company director. There is an equal opportunities working party, which includes four members of staff and a director. Departmental co-ordinators and staff are consulted about policies and training covering equality of opportunity. The company has clear equal opportunities policies for staff and learners and ensures that all work placements and employers have similar policies.

14. There are formal meetings each month for staff teams, departmental co-ordinators and directors to discuss equal opportunities, and this practice is effective in raising staff awareness. The working party champions equal opportunities and has devised a comprehensive questionnaire to evaluate the level of awareness of equal opportunities among staff. The results and issues raised by the questionnaire were discussed with staff during a training event. This was followed by an in-house training day to increase the understanding of equal opportunities by both staff and learners on work-based learning programmes. Additionally, almost 40 per cent of staff have recently completed a learndirect course on equal opportunities. Staff are knowledgeable and resolve issues related to equality of opportunity for learners.

15. Learners' understanding of all aspects of their training is good. They feel confident to discuss with staff any concerns they have relating to equal opportunities. Issues such as harassment, poor work scheduling, dyslexia and hearing impairment have been dealt with effectively by staff and learners, sometimes in consultation with employers. Staff recognise the needs of learners and offer individuals good support. For example, changes have been made to the font size and style used in printed notes which have also been translated into a foreign language to help a student with poor English skills. Learners have also received help with the development of basic skills and speak highly of the effective support that they receive from ATL's staff.

16. ATL promotes its services widely throughout the Plymouth area. Staff take part in exhibitions and providing advice for prospective learners throughout the community and at jobcentres. However, ATL's promotional literature contains photographic images that do not promote equality of opportunity but reinforce stereotypes. For example, photographs of women are shown only in materials on childcare and beauty therapy, and photographs of men are shown only in materials on computing.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

17. ATL has comprehensive quality assurance policies and procedures for most areas of its work. These have been developed over time, often through liaison with partner organisations, for example, the consortium of local schools and the college of further education. Quality assurance procedures for the work-based learning provision are not as well developed as those for other areas. However, staff do all they can to ensure continuous improvement across all levels of the organisation. There are monthly quality assurance meetings to develop and monitor the effectiveness of work-based learning procedures. These meetings are attended by the directors, the business link co-ordinator and the manager responsible for work-based learning. The meetings ensure that actions required by the local LSC are carried out and staff identify further ways of improving provision. The monthly team meetings include discussion of quality assurance arrangements, including assessment, internal verification, and equal opportunities. Informal meetings, which are very frequent, often clarify how particular procedures are introduced, or how they could be improved. Effective action to ensure continuous improvement is a key feature of the organisation.

18. There is a well-established self-assessment process at ATL. This is the first year that a separate self-assessment report for work-based learning has been produced. The report was produced in January 2002, and was updated in April and May in preparation for the inspection. There is a self-assessment team and all staff work with the team in the self-assessment process. Members of each curriculum team worked through the questions in the 'Common Inspection Framework' to analyse strengths and weaknesses in their area of training provision. Learners and employers were not included in the process directly. The self-assessment report is thorough, detailed and clear. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths and weaknesses in the self-assessment report. The development plan produced following self-assessment, focuses clearly on dealing with the weaknesses identified in the report. It identifies who takes responsibility for each action and the timescale within which improvements are to be made. An operational plan is in the process of being introduced, which will identify targets more clearly and specify when there will be internal audits and reviews. These systems are exceptionally well designed, but they have not yet been introduced fully. Similarly, the effectiveness of the development plan has not yet been reviewed. The operational plan has yet to be introduced.

19. The first intake of modern apprentices has yet to complete the training programmes, and the full cycle of quality assurance arrangements has yet to be implemented. The arrangements for recruitment and initial assessment have been reviewed and some improvements have been made. However, the introduction of more appropriate initial assessment methods is still being investigated. The self-assessment report identified that new work-based learning paperwork needs to be further developed. The development plan identifies that quality assurance procedures need to be established and evaluated. ATL's staff have worked well at introducing appropriate procedures but they are still incomplete. The internal verification process is not monitored sufficiently at a strategic level, and improvements introduced by the management group are not followed

consistently throughout ATL. The cycle of meetings does not include meetings of internal verifiers to standardise internal verification processes. The use of standardised paperwork is being piloted, but it is not seen as appropriate in all departments, and not all staff are using it. A series of procedures is being introduced, for auditing compliance with many aspects of quality assurance.

20. The collection and analysis of employers' and learners' feedback are insufficient. One month into each learner's training programme, employers are asked to reply to a very basic questionnaire. This is the only systematic attempt to include employers in the quality assurance arrangements. Employers' response rate is poor and the information gained is not useful in improving the quality of the training provision. Learners are asked to reply to questionnaires at different stages of their training programmes, but much of the information received is also of very limited usefulness. Some issues have been identified, and followed up successfully, but there has been no evaluation of the information gathered or of the effectiveness of the questionnaires. The company has not given priority to establishing arrangements for obtaining useful feedback from employers and learners on ways of improving provision.

Good Practice

Staff have developed learning materials for key skills training with specific reference to each vocational area. In addition, staff have ensured that learners can gather evidence of their acquisition of the key skills through short courses, such as those on health and safety and manual handling.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Health, social care & public services

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	52	2

21. ATL offers modern apprenticeships in care and early years care and education. There are 52 learners, two of whom are foundation modern apprentices, six are advanced modern apprentices and the remaining 44 are working towards NVQs in care and are employed in residential or nursing homes for the elderly. The eight learners working towards NVQs in early years care and education are employed in day nurseries, pre-schools, and a school for children with physical disabilities. Of these learners, 36 are foundation modern apprentices and eight are advanced modern apprentices. The contracts for work-based learning started in July 2001. Learners work towards the early years care and education NVQ. They attend training at ATL every week to gain background knowledge and build their portfolios of evidence. Key skills training is integral to the learning programmes. Learners working towards the NVQ in care are visited by the tutor/assessors in the workplace to gain their background knowledge. Key skills are taught separately at ATL, or at the workplace if necessary. There are 11 assessors responsible for the training and assessment of learning and six assessors also carry out internal verification. Assessors and verifiers are all appropriately qualified and suitably experienced.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2001-02															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	6															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	6															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2001-02															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	2															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	44															
Retained*	0															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in learning	44															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good support for learners from well-motivated staff
- good key skills training as an integral part of programmes
- effective and carefully monitored assessment of learners

WEAKNESSES

- poor understanding of the NVQ process among learners on care programmes

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- additional resources for learning in care programmes
- better use of networking information on care training
- greater variety of evidence in NVQ portfolios

22. Learners receive good support from ATL's trainers and assessors. There is accurate

and thorough accreditation of prior learning at induction, to ensure that learners do not have to repeat work and are on appropriate training courses. Learners receive initial assessment to identify their learning needs. Learners needing extra help receive individual coaching at times appropriate to their individual learning plan. There is a well-motivated team of staff who work well together, share experiences and problems, and update their skills continually. ATL's staff have good relationships with learners, who benefit from lively and well-informed training sessions. Assessors make regular, planned visits to the workplaces and there is a good relationship with employers, who are involved regularly in learners' progress reviews. The timing of visits is arranged flexibly to ensure that assessors can observe learners in the workplace. Assessors make every effort to visit the workplace at times which suit the learner, even if they have to do so at hours which are unsociable for them.

23. ATL is quick to take action if learners fall behind in their training. Because employers in care training are unable to release learners to attend ATL's training centre, ATL's staff provide training in background knowledge for the NVQs at the workplace either for individuals or small groups of learners. Learners provide evidence of their acquisition of knowledge and understanding of theory through assignment work and training records. Certificates from short courses are also used as evidence, where appropriate. Internal verification occurs throughout the training programme and is carefully recorded. In early years care and education, the teaching team has a range of specialisms, including psychology, childminding, and pre-school learning. This expertise is made available through specialised workshops to all learners who are interested in deepening and enhancing their knowledge and skills. Class reviews enable tutors to monitor the response to their teaching and to consider any concerns raised by learners. The records for these reviews include a section for areas where action is needed. The strength of the team and the support of its members for learners were identified in the self-assessment report.

24. Key skills training is introduced early in the training programme and is integral to work towards the NVQ. There is open access to key skills tuition throughout the week and learners can use the workshop facility freely. Learners are also able to use the extensive information technology (IT) equipment available. Learners can attend free short courses relevant to their training programme, which also help them to provide evidence for their NVQ and key skills qualifications. The key skills tutor has developed workbooks, which are related directly to the learners' training programme. The key skills tutor sometimes sits in on teaching sessions to become familiar with the course material. During these sessions, the key skills tutor is also able to assess key skills, for example by witnessing learners participating in discussions. Learners report that they find the key skills work helpful in the workplace. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

25. Members of the early years care team carry out effective and standardised assessment which is monitored carefully. The tutors and assessors check learners' understanding. They aim to ensure that learners become confident in compiling their portfolios of evidence. All five tutors are qualified assessors. In addition, they are, or are

working to become, qualified internal verifiers. ATL has appointed a unitary assessor, who will start work in September 2002. In four out of the six workplaces where learners are employed, there are also qualified assessors. Most of them do not assess because they have other duties, but they are familiar with the assessment process and can offer the learners help and support if necessary. Assessment is prompt. Learners do not have to wait for authorisation of their units. The learners' files show up-to-date monitoring of progress and learners have a clear idea of what they have achieved and of their next steps. After observing learners in the workplace, assessors discuss further work with them and help them plan which NVQ units they will complete next. When carrying out learners' progress reviews, assessors also make sure that learners know what they have to do to obtain their qualification. There are standardisation meetings at least once each term and more regularly if there are any particular issues the team wishes to examine. During these meetings, staff assess a unit and check that they are consistent in their application of assessment criteria and standards. Videos of work situations are also discussed. Although learners prefer their own tutor to assess them, the team ensures that learners are assessed by more than one assessor during the course of their programme.

26. Learners receiving training in care do not understand clearly the format of their training programme, or the process by which they will be assessed. The self-assessment report recognised that learners' shift work affects assessment, internal verification and the continuity of learning. ATL has yet to find an effective means of overcoming the difficulties shift work presents. The learners do not understand that they must have their skills assessed in order to complete a learning unit. They show little understanding of the requirements of the NVQ programme and are unclear about the extent of their progress towards achieving their qualification.

27. Some textbooks and other resources for learning in care are available at the training centre, but many learners either buy their own textbooks or rely on resources from the workplace. Learners are provided with a reading list but not with a standard textbook for their own use. Although a member of the care team attends meetings of networking forums regularly, information and details of good practice covered at these are not shared sufficiently with other staff. In many portfolios, evidence of learners' acquisition of NVQ competences is narrow in its range and lacks diversity and individuality. Evidence of learners' acquisition of knowledge is not collected through imaginative methods and is not always referenced clearly to the requisite standards. Learners seldom use personal statements or case studies as a means of presenting evidence.

Good Practice

The key skills tutor was asked for help with spelling by two learners for whom English is an additional language. One of their learners was delighted to receive a CD-ROM of spelling drills from the tutor by return of post.

Poor Practice

In the workplace, a member of the employer's staff came into the group where the learner was in charge and was sarcastic to one child and shamed another, providing a bad model for the learner. No action was taken by the training provider.