

INSPECTION REPORT

Aylesbury Training Group Reinspection

08 July 2003



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. 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 **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

SUMMARY

The provider

There have been no major changes in the status and activities of Aylesbury Training Group since the original inspection in April 2002. The group provides work-based learning for young people in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, information and communications technology, retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services. The total number of staff has decreased from 52 full-time and 44 part-time staff at the time of the original inspection to 44 full-time and 48 part-time staff. There are 845 learners, of whom 90 per cent are employed. Within the business centre which manages customer service and warehousing and care and early years care and education, there are nine full-time and three part-time permanent staff. A further 28 staff are self-employed. Learners in each area of learning are supported by an assessment team, which includes a team leader, trainers, assessors and internal verifiers. In customer service and warehousing, the number of learners has decreased to 42, and in care and early years care and education the number has increased to 68.

Overall judgement

The ALI's inspection in April 2002 found the training in retailing, customer service and transportation and in health, social care and public services was unsatisfactory. The provision is now satisfactory in both areas of learning.

Grades awarded

	Original	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Health, social care & public services	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

THE REINSPECTION

1. The reinspection of Aylesbury Training Group (ATG) was carried out in two stages. Three inspectors spent a total of 10 days reinspecting retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services. The first stage was carried out on 19 and 20 March 2003, and the second stage was completed on 7 and 8 July 2003. Inspectors met with 25 learners and 13 employers and carried out 27 interviews with ATG's staff. They reviewed 22 individual learning plans and 24 portfolios of evidence, and analysed retention and achievement data. In addition, inspectors reviewed the progress made by ATG with their post-inspection action plan.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	6
Total	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	6

AREAS OF LEARNING

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	42	3

2. ATG has 42 learners in customer service and distribution and warehousing operations. Thirty-one learners are employed in customer service and 11 in distribution and warehousing. This is a decrease of 20 learners since the original inspection. There are 33 advanced modern apprentices and nine foundation modern apprentices, all of whom are employed. There are 24 women and 18 men, of whom three are from minority ethnic groups. None of the learners have been identified as having additional learning or social needs. Learners are recruited through employers or by individual arrangement. At the start of their programme, all learners have an initial assessment which includes a skills audit and a key skills diagnostic evaluation and an induction to their learning programme. These activities take place in the learners' workplace, where learners also receive all their training, apart from training in information technology (IT) key skills. Staff from ATG visit learners in the workplace every three to four weeks to assess their portfolios and monitor and review their progress. Eleven occupationally competent staff carry out the assessments. There are seven qualified assessors, four staff who are working towards their assessor awards, and eight qualified internal verifiers.

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

STRENGTHS

- good achievement in distribution and warehousing operations
- good support for learners
- good on-the-job training for many learners
- good arrangements for the management of learning programmes

WEAKNESSES

- poor framework achievement in customer service
- no systematic initial assessment of basic skills
- inappropriate resource materials for distribution and warehousing operations

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better explanation and promotion of the employers' handbook
- more use of observations by customer service assessors

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3. Achievement and retention rates were poor at the time of the original inspection. ATG has made good progress in improving the retention rates. On all apprenticeship programmes, retention rates for 1999-2000 were 23 per cent, increasing slightly to 24 per cent in 2000-01. Since 2000-01, there has been significant year-on-year improvement in the retention rate which rose to 60 per cent in 2001-02 and is currently 86 per cent for 2002-03.

4. There is now good framework achievement for foundation modern apprentices in distribution and warehousing operations. Framework achievement in 1999-2000 was 21 per cent, increasing to 29 per cent for 2000-01. Of the 11 learners in learning during 2001-02, five have completed the framework and another two learners are awaiting certification.

5. There is good support for learners. Learners are visited in the workplace by their assessor every three to four weeks and the visits are well planned. Assessors offer additional support through e-mail and telephone. At the start of the programme, all learners attend a detailed audit of their skills to identify which parts of their work link to the national vocational qualification (NVQ). The skills audits are used effectively to plan each learner's training programme. Assessments in the workplace are satisfactory and individual action plans are written at the end of each visit. There is good communication between assessors and learners. All learners have a good understanding of what they have to do before the next visit from the assessor. Learners' progress towards achievement is recorded at each review and learners have a good understanding of the progress they are making towards their programme. Learners are very appreciative of the support given by assessors. All learners who are working towards the level 2 and level 3 NVQ in customer service are given a learning resource book which is easy to understand. This contains useful practical tips, ideas and guidance and is a reference and help for learners as they gather evidence from the workplace.

6. There is good on-the-job training for many learners, a strength identified at the original inspection. Learners have access to a wide range of learning opportunities in the workplace. Some employers also offer an extensive range of additional training courses, covering manual handling, communication, customer service, and lift truck training. There are good opportunities for career progression and one learner has progressed on to an advanced modern apprenticeship from an initial 12-week course in touch typing.

7. There are good arrangements for the management of learning. Following the appointment of the business centre manager, new management arrangements have been put in place. There is now a dedicated team leader for customer service and distribution and warehousing operations. There is a good system for recording and monitoring learners' progress and this information is used at monthly meetings between assessors and their team leader. There is a thorough system for the internal verification of portfolios and detailed feedback is given to assessors. There is good support for all assessors through three-monthly standardisation meetings and frequent individual meetings with their internal verifier. Unqualified assessors are given additional support

through a range of workshops and accompanied visits with their internal verifier. Arrangements are in place to share good practice and assessors are made aware of recommendations arising from external verifier reports. There is a consistent approach to assessment by all assessors. The arrangements for assessing key skills are now satisfactory in customer service and distribution and warehousing and there is better integration of key skills. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory, follow a prescribed format and include a diverse range of evidence. However, in customer service there is an over-reliance on the use of case studies for the level 3 NVQ.

8. The achievement rates in customer service are still poor. In 1998-99, 21 per cent of advanced modern apprentices completed the framework, and this increased slightly to 23 per cent in 1999-2000. In 2000-01, 8 per cent completed the framework, and the maximum possible achievement for the 2000-01 intake is 19 per cent. Although achievement rates are poor, there is now evidence of good progress being made by learners. Of the 24 starts between 2000 and 2002 who are still in learning, nine have achieved the NVQ at level 3 and another 11 learners have achieved three or more units. Learners are now making good progress towards completing their key skills and the enhancements for the framework.

9. There is no planned systematic initial assessment of basic skills. However, all learners are subject to diagnostic testing for key skills in communication and application of number. If the results of the tests are below a certain level, learners should then be subject to a basic skills initial assessment, but there was no evidence of this taking place during the reinspection. Learners who are exempt from key skills are not subject to initial assessment in basic skills. Arrangements are being put in place to ensure that all new starts take an initial assessment in basic skills and are given appropriate support, including access to specialist support from two other training providers.

10. All learners who are working towards the NVQ at level 2 in distribution and warehousing operations are given a textbook which is inappropriate for NVQ learners. The textbook does not cover the background knowledge requirements of the NVQ and is more applicable for learners on level 4 programmes.

11. There are still some employers that are not fully involved in the training programme. To resolve this weakness, which was identified at the last inspection, ATG has published an employers' handbook which outlines roles and responsibilities and promotes good practice. However, the employers' handbook has only just been published and many employers have not yet received a briefing on the contents of the handbook. At the reinspection there were still some examples of employers not being involved in assessment planning, monitoring of learners' progress, and reviews.

Good Practice

One customer service assessor carried out an observation of a learner at work at the start of the learner's programme. This enabled the assessor to get a better understanding of the learner's job and helped them to plan the future collection of evidence from the workplace. This introduces the learner to the idea of observations and helps to build a good working relationship at an early stage between the assessor and the learner.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	68	3

12. ATG offers modern apprenticeships and NVQ training in care and early years care and education. There are 27 advanced modern apprentices, 29 foundation modern apprentices and 12 learners taking NVQs. This is an increase of six since the original inspection. Of these, 45 learners are on early years care and education and 23 are on care programmes. There are two men and 66 women, of whom three are from a minority ethnic group. One of the learners has been identified as having additional learning needs. There are no learners with additional social needs. All learners are employed. Employers refer learners directly to ATG, which carries out an initial assessment, skills audit, key skills diagnostic audit, and agrees an individual learning plan with each learner. Work-based assessors who work for ATG carry out the assessment. All learners are offered off-the-job training at the training centre in Aylesbury or at the premises of other sector employers. Nineteen staff who train and assess learners are occupationally qualified and experienced. There are 13 qualified assessors, six staff who are working towards their assessor awards, and four qualified internal verifiers.

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

STRENGTHS

- good links with employers
- good assessment and portfolio management
- good integration of key skills with vocational training

WEAKNESSES

- poor achievement rates
- poorly managed off-the-job training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better understanding and participation by learners in their progress reviews

13. Links with employers are very good and there is an effective communication network. Assessor and staff visits are welcomed and their occupational competence and local knowledge is valued in the workplaces. Employers report that problems are dealt with swiftly and effectively and that ATG's staff are very accessible. ATG ensures that its staff keep employers informed about new developments and changes, and involve them

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in the learning process. ATG has recently produced an employers' handbook to further improve the link with employers. All employers fill in a five question check-sheet after each progress review to help them focus on the support for each learner.

14. The assessment process is thorough. While using good holistic observations, assessors make sure that learners can see what proportion of each unit has been achieved. The cross-referencing of evidence is effective and thorough. Assessments are frequent and learners are clear about their next steps and how they will achieve them. Portfolios are good and well organised with a strong emphasis on the learners' own thoughts and contain a wide range of meaningful evidence. Assessors offer a high level of support which learners appreciate and know how to access. Strategies for dealing with special problems such as dyslexia are well established and effective.

15. The original inspection identified problems with the late introduction of key skills. This has now been dealt with very effectively and key skills are introduced at induction. Assessors have been trained to ensure that they offer support for key skills. This complements the role of the teachers who help the learners with most of their key skills programme. There are good learning materials to support the delivery of key skills. Learners are enthusiastic and see key skills as an enhancement to their development.

16. Despite recent improvements, achievement rates remain poor. Although there has been a steady rise in the number of learners achieving the NVQ and completing the modern apprenticeship framework over the past three years, the results are still unsatisfactory. Achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices have risen from zero per cent in 1999-2000 to 9.5 per cent in 2000-01 and 21 per cent in 2001-02. Achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices show a rise from 7 per cent in 1999-2000 to 14 per cent in 2000-01, and 28 per cent in 2001-02.

17. The original inspection identified that the training was inconsistent and ineffectively planned and monitored. Although more off-the-job training has been introduced, it is still poorly managed. Some of the assessors do not tell their learners about it. There is no serious expectation that learners will attend. ATG does not monitor the quality of the training offered by other providers. Learning logs, which are designed to show the full range of learning, are not fully completed and are not used to plan individual learning programmes. Assessors are often unaware that on-the-job specialist training has taken place, such as a talk on dementia in a care home. There has been no consultation with learners to ascertain what times and venues would make it feasible for them to attend the new off-the-job training.

18. Some learners are still unsure about the function of their progress reviews, have little recall of them happening and confuse them with the regular and more frequent assessment reviews. As a result, opportunities for medium-term planning are not taken.

19. ATG has made improvements that are of real value to the learners. Induction is now satisfactory and is reviewed and revisited throughout the learners' time with ATG. Internal verification is satisfactory with effective sampling structures in place. Assessors

are well supported and aware of the procedures that need to be followed. There are systematic training programmes for new assessors, although it is still too early to judge their effectiveness.

Good Practice

Employers are given a short questionnaire to complete after each progress review to ensure that they are aware of and are responsive to learners' needs, and support their progress.