

INSPECTION REPORT

Damar Training

24 March 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 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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Damar Training is a private company which offers work-based provision in Stockport and the Greater Manchester area, from its premises in Stockport town centre. The company provides vocational training to adults and young learners in business administration, management and professional, more specifically, in business administration and accounting.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, provision in business administration and accounting is satisfactory. Damar Training's leadership and management, quality assurance and equal opportunities are also satisfactory.

GRADES

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

Business administration, management & professional	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- good additional courses
- particularly effective management of links with employers
- good monitoring of training processes

KEY WEAKNESSES

- low retention and achievement rates
- insufficient planning for basic skills
- insufficient promotion of equal opportunities

DAMAR TRAINING

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of equal opportunities data

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at Damar Training (Damar) in March 2003. They interviewed 35 learners, 13 employers, and visited 14 workplaces. Inspectors held 19 interviews with the provider's staff, and observed three training sessions and a range of meetings to review learners' progress and assess the learners. Inspectors also examined 15 individual learning plans and assessed six portfolios. They studied a range of written material including the company's plans, policies and procedures. The inspectors examined the company's self-assessment report and its development plan, which was revised in February 2003.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
Total	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Damar was established in 1980 by the present managing director and is jointly owned by its managing director and finance director. The company operates from premises situated in the centre of Stockport. It provides work-based learning for young people, which is funded by Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It also carries out commercial training for individuals and businesses.

3. There are currently 149 modern apprentices on work-based learning programmes, of whom there are 90 foundation modern apprentices, 43 advanced modern apprentices and 16 learners on national vocational qualifications (NVQ) accounting training programmes at levels 2 and 3. The company has 14 full-time staff, of whom two are the directors, one is the training manager, one the business development manager, five are trainers and three have responsibility for learners' recruitment and schools liaison. Damar also employs two administrators.

4. Stockport's population, based on 2001 census is 284,402, 73.4 per cent of whom are employed in the service sector. In May 2002, the rate of unemployment in Stockport was 2 per cent compared with the national average of 3 per cent. The 1991 census shows that 2.4 per cent of the population of Stockport are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent, although in some Stockport wards, there are considerably higher percentages. In September 2001, the proportion of school leavers in Stockport achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 54 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

Work-based learning for young people

5. All learners receive good individual support. Short-term action-planning for the learners is also good. The learners receive good guidance and planning advice for career progression. However, the retention and achievement rates of modern apprentices starting in 2000-01 is low. There are also insufficient resources for basic skills training. Some foundation modern apprentices in business administration progress slowly.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

6. Two owner/directors jointly manage Damar. The finance director monitors the financial position of the company and has responsibility for the development of the company's computing resources. The managing director is responsible for the strategic management of the company and its day-to-day management.

7. Operationally, Damar has been organised into two divisions. Damar Business College and Damar Training. Damar Business College offers advanced and foundation modern apprentice training and NVQ training. Damar Training provides a wide range of training courses to companies and private individuals in information technology and business training from its premises or from the companies' premises. The staff operate across both divisions of Damar. The staff work within three teams, sales and recruitment, administration and training and assessment. The learners use the facilities and the provision of both divisions.

8. From an operational perspective, a training manager and a business development manager and 10 full-time staff support the managing director. There are three staff who co-ordinate recruitment of learners, work placements and schools liaison. There are five trainers, who have responsibility for training and assessment of the learners. There are also two administrative staff who support all the other staff. One of the trainers, who is an internal verifier, reports to the training manager.

9. Damar has an equal opportunities policy, a set of written procedures for quality assuring, and a quality assurance audit schedule. There are written procedures for handling complaints and grievances. Self-assessment has taken place since 1998. The most recent report was produced in October 2002 and was updated for the inspection in February 2003. In October 2002, Damar was accredited with the Investors in People award, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

STRENGTHS

- strongly focused strategic direction
- particularly effective management of links with employers
- effective interventions on equal opportunities issues
- good processes to monitor training

WEAKNESSES

- lack of consistent management information system
- insufficient planning for basic skills
- insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better communication of the criteria for selection of learners
- better distribution of notes from management meetings
- better use of equal opportunities data
- better access arrangements for learners with mobility difficulties

10. Damar has a strongly focused strategic direction. Following a restructuring in 2001, the company has taken strong and effective action to improve its quality of training. New staffing procedures have been adopted and some staff, who did not meet the required performance levels, were replaced with new staff. However, this has led to high staff turnover, which has had an impact on the progress of some learners. The company's business plan was reviewed which now contains clear objectives. There are explicit priorities, which are well communicated and promoted within the company. The priorities include recruitment, retention and achievement targets. All staff have a good understanding of these priorities and are very clear about how they contribute towards achieving them in their day-to-day work. For example, all the learners' comments are dealt with promptly. The philosophy of continuous improvement, which is promoted by the managing director, is shared by staff who are keen to play their part in the development of the business. The managing director reinforces these priorities on a regular basis and maintains a strong leadership in this area. The managing director is closely involved with monitoring the quality of training, and through weekly meetings, monitors the progress of the learners. Damar is developing a good environment with learners benefiting from good resources which include up-to-date computing facilities.

11. Internal communication in Damar is satisfactory and staff have appropriate opportunities for regular, informal discussion with the director. There are regular, well-attended team meetings and communication events, which are well used to build effective teams. Notes are taken from these meetings, but they are not effectively distributed to all who attend.

12. All staff receive a full appraisal once a year, at which their performance and contribution in helping the learners is effectively monitored. New staff receive a good induction into Damar's priorities and challenges. There is also a good system for monitoring staff activities through monthly individual discussion with their manager. These discussions are effectively used to provide help and support for staff in meeting the needs of learners. There is a programme of staff development, which is linked to the company's business plan, and many staff attend additional training courses to assist them in their roles. For example, staff have attended training courses in time management, assertiveness and first aid. All staff are appropriately qualified for their roles.

13. Damar is particularly effective at managing its links with employers. It has close contacts with many local companies and has a large database of those who may provide suitable work opportunities for the learners. Damar has developed a good

understanding of the requirements of these companies and uses this knowledge productively. There are very effective arrangements for placing learners which are recruited directly from schools, or who are unemployed. For example, potential learners who are recruited from schools, or are unemployed take a written test and an interview as part of a selection process. This helps the learners to gain a good understanding of employers' requirements. The learners and employers value this arrangement. However, some learners are not fully informed of the selection criteria which Damar uses. For example, learners are not made aware that if their test scores are low, they may be refused a place with Damar. Those who are unsuccessful are directed to other, more suitable, providers. Damar has helped many learners to find full-time work within a few days of their recruitment interview and some have been offered more than one possible job. Damar's working relationship with many companies is long lasting and well used to provide opportunities for learners. For example, several of Damar's previous learners have been promoted to senior positions in these local companies and are now effective workplace supervisors for current learners. This strength was only partially recognised in the self-assessment report.

14. Damar has not developed sufficient arrangements to support learners who require help with basic skills. This weakness was not recognised in its self-assessment report. Arrangements for identifying basic skills needs in learners who are already employed are unsatisfactory. For example, Damar does not use any systematic tests or assessment methods, relying only on subjective judgements of the trainers. Damar has not collected sufficient information to assess how many of its learners require help and has not made adequate plans to provide any specialist support for these learners.

15. Damar uses a commercially designed management information system and three databases, which provide information on learners' gender, ethnicity, retention and achievement. However, some of these data are not accurate and the databases provide inconsistent operational information. For example, there are discrepancies between the data for the LSC's contract compliance and the learners' achievement and retention information. The achievement and retention figures in the company's self-assessment report did not provide Damar with accurate information about the progress of its learners, even though its self-assessment report identified low achievement and retention as a weakness. The company is in the process of developing a new management information system. This weakness was recognised in the self-assessment report.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

16. The responsibility for equal opportunities lies with the managing director of Damar. The company has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, which is annually reviewed. Detailed procedures covering complaints, bullying and harassment support this policy. The learners receive this information during their induction through a presentation and written material. Most learners are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Accounting learners study their rights and responsibilities at work as part of their modern apprenticeship framework. Equal opportunities also features in the induction of Damar's new staff.

17. Damar takes learners' complaints very seriously and responds to them systematically and thoroughly. It also maintains a record of these complaints. Managers and staff intervene effectively to tackle equal opportunities issues affecting learners at work. They deal with these issues sensitively, decisively and promptly. There are good procedures established to ensure that learners who are affected by their employer's poor practice or poor implementation of equal opportunities policies are found new work placements. Damar no longer places learners in work placements where there have been problems with equal opportunities.

18. Damar collects information on equal opportunities, but this information is not always used in decision-making and planning of programmes. Data on equal opportunities are collected on gender, ethnicity and disability, but these data are not systematically used to monitor the effectiveness of Damar's policies and practices on equal opportunities.

19. Damar does not promote equality of opportunities adequately. The company relies on its open-door policy to attract learners from under-represented groups. Equal opportunities is not sufficiently reinforced during the learners' progress review. There is an insufficient range of positive equal opportunities images in Damar's promotional, publicity and training materials. The company's marketing activities do not systematically inform the under-represented groups of Damar's provision and its resources. Damar does not actively promote equal opportunities with the employers and has an inadequate approach with some work-placement providers in explaining its expectations regarding equal opportunities. The company did not identify this weakness in its self-assessment report.

20. There are adequate arrangements for learners with restricted mobility through partnership with the local connexion services, but these arrangements require further improvements.

Quality assurance**Contributory grade 3**

21. Damar has good arrangements for monitoring the quality of the training processes. Each trainer is responsible for a group of learners and the implementation of an extensive written procedure, which details all the elements of the learning process. This enables the learners to follow a well-structured training programme. Compliance with these procedures is audited regularly and there is an effective system for changing the procedures for improvements. For example, there are regular and thorough checks to ensure that recruitment procedures are closely followed, that all new learners are visited in the workplace shortly after their start date and that all subsequent reviews and visits to learners take place promptly.

22. There are satisfactory arrangements for collecting feedback from learners and employers about training. Damar uses a wide variety of written questionnaires and telephone surveys. Return rates for questionnaires are high. Damar is also effective at encouraging learners to register complaints when they are unhappy about any aspect of their training or to record compliments when they have received good service. They investigate any adverse comments or complaints thoroughly and take appropriate corrective action quickly.

23. There are satisfactory arrangements for observing training sessions and giving appropriate feedback on training techniques. Arrangements for internal verification are also satisfactory. Internal verification is carried out regularly and is adequately planned. The outcomes are recorded on an internal verification sheet. The written feedback on observations is detailed, but is sometimes descriptive rather than evaluative, providing insufficient information about what has been done well and what might be improved. The internal verification of portfolios is regular, but again, some of the written feedback lacks detail.

24. Damar's self-assessment report provides a satisfactory assessment of the quality of its training provision. It has correctly identified most strengths, although it also identifies a few standard practices as strengths. A few weaknesses have also been omitted and some, which have been identified, have no significant impact on learners. Inspectors gave the same grades as the grades given in Damar's self-assessment report.

Good Practice
<i>Damar has a good scheme for celebrating the success not only of its learners and staff, but also of any employers and workplace supervisors who have helped learners to achieve success. Staff, learners and employers are all presented with small awards and certificates to mark their achievements and success is widely publicised in Damar's internal newsletter.</i>

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	149	3

25. There are 149 learners in business administration and accounting, all of whom are employed. There are 90 foundation modern apprentices in business administration training and 16 in accounting training. There are also 43 advanced modern apprentices, of whom 35 are in business administration training and eight in accounting training. Learners can start training at any time of the year. Learners are recruited through direct enquiries from employers and learners, through the referral services, or in response to marketing activities. The recruitment process includes a presentation to the learners about Damar, its facilities, the range of qualifications offered, and the company's objectives, an interview and an initial assessment. The learners who are already employed and have been referred by their employers do not take the initial assessment. Parents are invited to attend the presentation and the interview sessions. Induction takes place at Damar's premises or in the workplace.

26. All modern apprentices are visited in the workplace for training and assessment of their NVQ and key skills. Most of the learners are visited every four weeks except for those learners who attend day-release who are visited every four to eight weeks, depending on their needs. Learners have a formal progress review every 12 weeks. There are five qualified assessors, all of whom assess business administration, and one who assesses accounting. There is one qualified internal verifier.

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)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	17		40		56											
Retained*	0		4	10	34	61											
Successfully completed	0		4	10	27	48											
Still in learning	17		25	62	1	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																	
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
	Number of starts	49		117		66											
Retained*	0		11	9	31	47											
Successfully completed	0		11	9	27	41											
Still in learning	40		62	53	4	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

STRENGTHS

- particularly good range of on-the-job training
- good additional training
- good short-term action-planning

WEAKNESSES

- low retention and achievement rates
- insufficient resources for basic skills needs
- some slow progress for foundation modern apprentices in business administration

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more effective use of initial assessment
- higher attendance of learners at the off-the-job training

27. The learners benefit from good employers who offer a varied and appropriate range of learning opportunities and support the learners' training. Staff at Damar have established productive links with these employers, which enables them to find highly suitable employment opportunities for learners. For example, the learners have been placed in solicitors and accountancy firms, architectural companies, and financial and retail businesses. Each learner's abilities and interests are carefully and thoroughly considered to ensure that the work they are required to do is relevant to their individual needs and aspirations. Damar monitors the job specifications to ensure that learners are given suitable learning opportunities and can achieve their NVQ.

DAMAR TRAINING

28. Damar provides day-release training for NVQs and key skills in addition to a range of commercial specialist courses, which learners can access. Courses offered include telephone and presentation skills, a range of information technology courses, customer service and a range of NVQ-specific courses such as costing and double-entry book keeping. Some employers do not give learners the opportunity to attend off-the-job training at Damar's premises. For these learners, the monthly visits from assessors are well structured to ensure that sufficient time is allowed to provide individual training, coaching and support.

29. Short-term action-planning for learners is good. At every visit, the trainer and learner agree on an action plan. This sets out the schedule of work which the learner will do before the next visit. The actions have clear achievement dates linked to NVQ and key skills units. Elements of key skills are also clearly planned and are mostly integrated in the learner's work. The targets are negotiated with the employers so that appropriate learning opportunities can be provided. Many employers support these action plans and agree to changes in the learner's work so that the learner can meet their qualification requirements. For example, a learner was given work in the payroll department for a short period in order to prepare a manual payroll to meet the accounting requirements. Another learner was given the opportunity to prepare the value added tax (VAT) return. Each progress monitoring visit starts with a thorough discussion of the progress of the action plan. During the workplace visits, a wide range of assessment methods are used, including observation of the learner at work and witness testimonies written by employers.

30. The learners receive good additional training at Damar's premises. Learners are encouraged to attend free-of-charge, in-house courses, which are provided on a commercial basis for Damar's customers. These include vocational tasters in business administration, information technology, confidence-building, health and safety, presentation skills and a range of customer-care day courses. From the beginning of the training programmes Damar encourages learners and employers to consider suitable routes from foundation to advanced modern apprenticeships and beyond and to attend other courses for career progression and financial enhancement. This approach motivates the learners and engages the employers in supporting the learners' training and progression. The learners benefit from these additional training opportunities and the acquired skills. Significant numbers of learners are very clear about their progression options and career plans and are taking steps to realise their plans. There are a number of learners who have been promoted and are progressing to the next level of qualification.

31. Retention and achievement are low. This weakness was identified in Damar's self-assessment report. During the period 2000-2001, of the 56 advanced modern apprentices who started their programme, only 48 per cent completed all the targets on their modern apprenticeship framework. During the same period, only 41 per cent of foundation modern apprentices completed all the targets on their framework. Retention rates are similarly low but have significantly improved during the past two years. Damar

has adopted extensive organisational changes and implemented a good range of new procedures and practices to further improve retention and achievement rates. For example, learners who have not achieved their qualifications within the expected duration of their programmes are supported with extra resources. During the period 2001-02, of the 40 advanced modern apprentices who started their programmes, 72 per cent have been retained or are still in learning and are making satisfactory progress. All the modern apprentices who started 2002-03 are still in learning and making satisfactory progress. Additionally, 81 per cent of the foundation modern apprentices who started in 2002-03 are still in learning.

32. There are inadequate arrangements for basic skills support. Learners who apply directly to Damar complete a basic skills assessment. The results from the assessment do not always provide a basis for individual basic skills support. Basic skills needs are not always identified in the individual learning plans. The trainers do not have basic skills expertise and do not have access to basic skills resources. There is an established support system for key skills development and trainers see this as a suitable alternative. Learners who are already employed when they are recruited onto the training programme do not complete a basic skills assessment, but their needs are identified on the basis of an informal discussion.

33. Some foundation modern apprentices on business administration NVQs have made slow progress towards completing all their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Six learners who are expected to complete the targets within the next four months have not made sufficient progress to date. Previously, some modern apprentices had made insufficient progress towards their qualification, however, the progression rate for these learners has now improved. Some learners have had three different assessors in the past nine months and their progress reviews have been ineffective and infrequent. For example, the progress of two learners were not reviewed for 11 weeks and another learner's progress review was ineffective, as the trainer did not spend sufficient time with the learners. The company has recognised this weakness and has adopted new arrangements. These include staff changes and close monitoring of the schedule of progress review visits, which are improving some learners' progress.

34. The resources for learners are satisfactory. The training environment in the company is professionally decorated and is welcoming. Computing facilities are available to all learners who attend the centre. Training rooms are available for tutorials and group work. Staff have suitable qualifications and are occupationally qualified.