

INSPECTION REPORT

Didac Limited

07 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 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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning 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

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.

INSPECTION REPORT

Didac Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Didac Limited (Didac) was established in 1997 as a private training company specialising in training and development in wood machining, furniture production and handcrafted furniture. The company has three shareholding directors, two of whom work part time. The managing director is the only full-time employee. There are five self-employed assessors/trainers and one employed assessor/trainer who also work part time. There are two office-based employees. In August 1998, Somerset Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) contracted with the company to provide training leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 2 and modern apprenticeships in furniture-related occupations. Didac contracts with Somerset Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for 22 learners based in the Southwest. There are currently 20 learners, of whom 12 are advanced modern apprentices and eight are on other work-based learning programmes. The company also provides specialist training and a consultancy service to other training companies, national organisations and employers. In July 2000 Didac achieved the Investors in People award, a nationally recognised standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people and was reaccredited in June 2003.

2. Didac's office is in Bristol. Learners are employed in 12 companies based throughout the Southwest. All training is carried out by Didac's staff in the employer's premises. In May 2003 the unemployment rate in the Southwest was 1.7 per cent, compared with the national average of 2.6 per cent. There are areas of high unemployment in some parts of the region. The main occupational areas providing employment are retail and warehousing, agriculture, commercial services and manufacturing. The proportion of school leavers in the Southwest achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was over 52 per cent in 2001, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. In the Southwest, less than 2 per cent of the population are from minority ethnic groups.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. There are 20 learners on furniture manufacturing learning programmes. Twelve learners are following an advanced modern apprenticeship programme and eight learners are on NVQ training programmes at levels 2 and 3. All learners are employed in furniture manufacturing companies in the Southwest. Off-the-job training is provided by Didac staff as well as job-specific skills and key skills. They also carry out assessments. Assessments are planned to be carried out at least once a month but are usually more frequent.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learner interviews	19
Number of staff interviews	24
Number of employer interviews	11
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

4. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, work-based learning in manufacturing and leadership and management are good. Equality of opportunity is good and quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

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

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

5. **Learners produce good practical work** which is accurately set out, machined and handcrafted where appropriate. All learners' work meets industrial standards. Learners demonstrate good practical skills and make very good progress. Achievement rates are satisfactory.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

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

6. **Teaching is good**, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. All learners have individual tuition with a trainer in their employer's premises, usually every two to four weeks. Trainers are well qualified, have good current professional knowledge and make good use of relevant examples of industrial practice. They have a good understanding of learner' needs and abilities. The teaching sessions are well managed and include good diagrams, photographs and videos of relevant technical topics.

7. **There is a good learner support.** There are good working relationships between trainers and learners. The learners have ready access, through their trainers and relevant resources, to good information, advice and guidance.

8. **There are highly productive links with employers**, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. There is good communications between the provider and the employers. Staff respond effectively to the needs of employers and their learners.

9. **There is incomplete recording of learner's progress on the progress reviews forms**, a weakness identified in the self assessment report. Some parts are not completed and others include poorly detailed comments that do not provide appropriate information for the learner. The progress reviews are thorough and conducted appropriately, but the judgements, advice and targets in the documentation do not reflect this. The provider has made changes recently to tackle this issue, but it is too early to make a judgement on its effectiveness.

10. **Inadequate use is made of initial assessment.** This weakness is recognised in the self-assessment report. For example, the results of the initial assessments are not incorporated into the learners' individual learning plans. There have been very recent changes to strengthen initial assessment and changes have been made to the individual learning plans to cover basic skills learning needs. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements.

Leadership and management

11. **There is strong leadership with effective communication systems.** Staff work well to ensure continuous improvement. There are effective internal communications, both formal and informal. Staff fully understand the role of the organisation and its training.

12. **There is highly effective staff development.** Staff performance is monitored through appraisal and observation of training sessions. Managers give a high priority to staff training. Good use is made of staff review interviews. Staff needs are identified and

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training needs met by a combination of in-house and specialist training. Staff frequently visit local and national conferences and training events. Staff who attend these events produce written reports and provide feedback at staff meetings. All staff have equal access to training, regardless of their contracted hours.

13. **There is very effective promotion of health and safety practices.** All learners receive very effective health and safety training during their induction. This is carried out in the workplace. Staff provide good learner support and ensure learners understand how to take sufficient care of themselves and their colleagues in the workplace. This training also improves the health and safety awareness of learners' work colleagues.

14. **Management of equality of opportunity arrangements is good.** There are comprehensive policies on equal opportunities, anti-harassment and other relevant issues with appropriate procedures that are updated each year. Copies are given to all learners during their induction and employers receive copies when the policies are updated. All learners are employed and Didac thoroughly monitors the equal opportunity arrangements in employers' premises. Most employers have their own equal opportunities policies. Those that do not have a policy adopt the policy from Didac. Staff understanding of equal opportunities is good. Employers' recruitment practices are checked and monitored. Didac conducts an annual survey with employers analysing data on the number and type of applicants for each vacancy, as well as the number and types of learner recruited. This information is used to encourage employers to increase the number of learners from under-represented groups. Learners and employers' responsibility for equal opportunities and health and safety is covered thoroughly and clearly in well-produced information packs.

15. **Good use is made of the management information system.** Didac works closely with the software provider to ensure their management information needs are met. All progress reviews are recorded, learner' progress is monitored, and a wide range of performance measures are analysed. A recent addition has been the inclusion of a template to produce a specific individual learning plan. This is a comprehensive document, which is easily updated and reflects appropriate information on learners.

16. **Recording of meetings is insufficiently thorough.** The meetings are well planned with good agendas and minutes are taken and circulated promptly. However these notes do not sufficiently reflect the discussions or the decisions taken. The resulting actions or timescales and responsibilities identified are not adequately recorded. There is insufficient recording of the progress of tasks.

17. **There is insufficient involvement of staff in the self-assessment process.** Self-assessment did not adequately include all staff, and did not take account of the views of learners and employers. The managing director, in consultation with partners, produced a draft report that was then circulated to staff for comment. Few comments were received. Although the views of learners and employers were collected these were not systematically incorporated into the report. The self-assessment report accurately identified some of the strengths identified by inspectors. However, some strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice and some key weaknesses

identified by inspectors were not identified.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- strong leadership
- very effective staff development
- very effective promotion of health and safety practices
- good use of management information
- good management of equality of opportunity arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of meetings
- insufficient involvement of staff in self-assessment processes

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good practical work produced by learners
- good teaching
- good learner support
- very productive links with employers

Weaknesses

- incomplete recording of learners' progress on progress review forms
- inadequate use of initial assessments

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT DIDAC LIMITED:

- the individual coaching
- the work-based learning on employer's premises
- being treated as an adult
- the support from staff
- the high standard of health and safety teaching
- participating in international competitions
- lots of time to ask questions
- good working atmosphere

WHAT LEARNERS THINK DIDAC LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the frequency of training visits
- the assessment of real work rather than projects
- the amount of form filling of assessment details

KEY CHALLENGES FOR DIDAC LIMITED:

- to more consistently record quarterly progress reviews
- to better set targets
- to make better use of initial assessment
- to involve all staff and employers in the self-assessment process
- to improve the recording of meetings

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- strong leadership
- very effective staff development
- very effective promotion of health and safety practices
- good use of management information
- good management of equality of opportunity arrangements

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of meetings
- insufficient involvement of staff in self-assessment processes

18. Leadership is strong, with effective communication systems. Staff work well to ensure continuous improvement, as noted in the self-assessment report. There are effective internal communications, both formal and informal. Staff fully understand the role of the organisation and its training. Good use is made of regular newsletters, telephone contacts and e-mail. There is good communication with staff who work away from the provider's headquarters.

19. There are regular meetings for all staff. These meetings focus on key training issues, learner' progress, and the company's developments. The meetings are well planned with good agendas. Minutes are taken and circulated to all staff. However, these notes are not adequately detailed. They do not record decisions taken, or actions, timescales and responsibilities identified. There is not enough recording of the progress of tasks. Generally, however, communication with staff is effective. Communication with employers is also effective. Employers receive good help, advice and support from staff.

20. Staff development is very effective. Staff performance is monitored through appraisal and observation of training sessions. Managers give a high priority to staff training. Appraisals are conducted by a non-executive director. Good use is made of staff review interviews, and staff needs are identified and training needs met through a combination of in-house and specialist training. Staff frequently visit local and national conferences and training events. Staff who attend such events produce written reports and provide feedback at staff meetings. All staff have equal access to training, regardless of their contracted hours.

21. There is very effective promotion of health and safety practices. The self-assessment report identifies this as a strength. All learners receive very effective health and safety training during their induction. This is carried out in the workplace. The provider's staff

provide good learner support and ensure that learners understand how to take sufficient care of themselves and their colleagues in the workplace. This training also improves the health and safety awareness of learners' colleagues at work.

22. Good use is made of the management information system, a strength acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Didac works closely with the software provider to ensure the management information needs are met. All quarterly reviews are recorded, learners' progress is monitored, and wide ranges of performance measures are analysed. A recent addition has been the inclusion of a template to produce a specific individual learning plan. This is a comprehensive document, which is easily updated and reflects appropriate information on learners. This has not yet been implemented for all learners.

23. Resources are managed efficiently. Good use is made of part-time staff, suiting both their individual needs and providing flexibility for the organisation with sufficient numbers of suitably qualified staff. All training takes place in employers' premises. Learners have access to a wide range of up-to-date and industrial-standard tools, machinery and equipment. However, Didac does not have adequate control over teaching accommodation. A lot of teaching takes place in inadequate accommodation. Effective use is made of laptops taken by staff to the workplaces to support key skills training and assessment.

24. Literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory. All learners carry out an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. Although no learner to date has been identified as needing additional support, the training advisers adequately meet all learners' identified needs. A computer-based assessment is now in place, but it is too early to judge its impact.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

25. There is good management of the equality of opportunity arrangements. There are comprehensive policies on equal opportunities, anti-harassment and other relevant issues with appropriate procedures that are updated each year. Copies are given to all learners during their induction and employers receive copies when the policies are updated. All learners are employed and Didac thoroughly monitors the equal opportunities arrangements in employers' premises. Most employers have their own equal opportunities policy. Those that do not, adopt the policy from Didac. There is a clear grievance and complaints procedure set out in the procedures manual. There are useful additional guidance notes given to leavers and employers. Currently no learners are women. One learner is from a minority ethnic group and one learner has a disability. There is one woman assessor/trainer and one from minority ethnic group.

26. The managing director and other staff have attended equal opportunities training days organised by Somerset LLSC. Information from these events and from other sources is used during internal equal opportunities training days for all staff. Staff have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues. Employers' recruitment practices are checked and monitored. Industry equal opportunities data are analysed. Didac conducts an annual survey with employers to monitor the number and type of people

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working for each employer. Part of the survey includes collecting and analysing data on the number and type of applicants for each vacancy as well as the number and type of learner recruited. This information is used to encourage employers to increase the number of learners from under-represented groups. Some employers involve Didac in their recruitment process.

27. Induction promotes and reinforces equality of opportunity with learners. Learners and employers' responsibility for equal opportunities and health and safety is covered thoroughly and clearly in well-produced information packs. These contain well-written and interesting leaflets and guidance notes. The guidance notes have recently been updated and an additional booklet on diversity and harassment is now included. There is no additional training or development to increase learners' understanding of equal opportunities after induction. However, all learners have a good understanding of issues relating to diversity. Employers are also given detailed and useful guidance notes with their information pack, which includes the employers' responsibilities for equal opportunities and recruitment. Marketing materials promote equality of opportunity with use of appropriate images.

28. There is a separate and comprehensive harassment policy and complaints procedure. Staff and learners are given a copy of these as part of the quality assurance manual. Learners have the policy explained to them during induction and have a good understanding of different types of harassment and bullying. Staff check learners understanding by asking questions during learners' progress reviews. Most employers attend the progress reviews. Where issues have been raised, they have been monitored and resolved effectively. The policy is also monitored through the responses to learners' questionnaires.

29. Didac promotes equality of opportunity among under-represented groups. Specific schools have been identified and Didac has asked if presentations can be made to the pupils who are leaving school in the summer term. Although there has not been much response to this, two client companies are involved with the schools link project giving work experience to local sixth form pupils. Didac has also organised a successful seminar for local Connexions staff and careers teachers.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

30. Didac collects a wide range of information from employers and learners. These data are analysed and presented in clear and informative documents. Information is collected by questionnaires and a high level of response is obtained. Comparisons are made for year-on-year data. Didac has also collected information, from published reports, for similar and competitor organisations and benchmarked their performance against the judgements in these reports. However, managers are not making sufficient use of this information to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programmes and plan for improvement.

31. There is a comprehensive range of policies and procedures covering all the key processes of training, with the exception of disaster recovery. All staff have copies of

both the policies and procedures and learners are given copies of the policies during their induction. The policies and procedures are audited and, if required, updated regularly within an annual cycle.

32. Internal verification is satisfactory. There are three internal verifiers, giving sufficient coverage and flexibility, but only one is currently active. Verification of the assessment process is systematically planned, with observations of assessments throughout the learners' programme, and a well-planned programme of verification of assessors and NVQ units. All learners' portfolios are verified on completion. However, internal verification does not lead effectively to improvement of the assessment process. Insufficient guidance is given to assessors on improvements in feedback and learners' work. Assessors often give insufficiently detailed feedback to learners and rarely comment on their basic skills. This is not identified in the external verifier reports.

33. The self-assessment process did not adequately include all staff, and did not take account of the views of learners and employers. The managing director, in consultation with partners, produced a draft report that was then circulated to staff for comment. Few comments were received. Although the views of learners and employers were collected, these were not systematically incorporated into the report. The self-assessment report accurately identified some of the strengths identified by inspectors. However, some strengths identified in the report are no more than normal practice and some key weaknesses identified by inspectors were not identified.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	20	2

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good practical work produced by learners
- good teaching
- good learner support
- very productive links with employers

Weaknesses

- incomplete recording of learners' progress on progress review forms
- inadequate use of initial assessments

Achievement and standards

34. All of the learners are in employment and all of their training takes place in the workplace. Learners produce good practical work, which is accurately set out, machined and handcrafted where appropriate. All learners' work is produced within their company and meets industrial standards. Learners demonstrate good practical skills. For example, in wood machining and in upholstery the learners fully understand their practical work and their individual practical projects. Learners make very good progress. They develop good workplace skills. One learner took part in the national finals of a machine woodworking competition. Other learners contribute to the international wood machinery exhibition held at the National Exhibition Centre.

35. Achievement rates are satisfactory. The proportion of learners who have started their learning programmes since 2000 and who are still in training is also satisfactory. Learners' portfolios of evidence are comprehensive and contain a wide range of evidence. They contain photographs of practical work completed and learners using the various machines.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	8		8		3		9		11		2				
Retained*	0		0		0	0	6	67	7	64	2	100				
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	6	67	7	64	2	100				
Still in learning	6		5		1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0				

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	9		3		4		7		5						
Retained*	0		1	33	2	50	5	71	5	100						
Successfully completed	0		1	33	2	50	5	71	5	100						
Still in learning	7		1	33	0	0	0	0	0	0						

*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

Quality of education and training

36. Teaching is good, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. All learners have individual tuition with a trainer at their employer's premises, usually every two to four weeks. Trainers are well qualified, have good, current professional knowledge and make good use of relevant examples of industrial practice. They have a good understanding of learners' needs and abilities. Learners are taught both the theory and practical elements in the workplace. The teaching sessions are well managed and learners are provided with good learning materials, including good diagrams, photographs and videos of relevant technical topics. Learners are encouraged to take responsibility for organising their own work. Learners work well during the training sessions and question trainers on a wide range of technical points. There is good discussion between learners and the trainers. Trainers frequently demonstrate practical skills techniques to the learners. Learners work well in the practical sessions. The trainer, in conjunction with the employer and learner, develop specific practical projects for the learner. This ensures that the full breadth of practical activities required for the NVQ programme is covered. Key skills are well integrated in the curriculum and are well understood by learners and trainers. Learners' notes and files are comprehensive and accurately show their progress.

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37. There is a good learner support, a strength identified in the self-assessment report. There are good working relationships between trainers and learners. The learners have ready access, through their trainers and relevant resources, to good information, advice and guidance.

38. Links with employers are highly productive. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. Staff respond effectively to the needs of employers and their learners. There are good communications between the provider and the employers. Some of the smaller companies depend on the provider to ensure that their learners obtain all of the necessary training and experience to progress and achieve their qualification.

39. Learners have access to their employer's machines and specialist equipment and health and safety aspects relevant to the workplace are covered thoroughly in the training sessions. This is generally satisfactory and some of it is good. For example, most learners have access to computer-controlled machines. The provider has developed a wide range of highly relevant training materials. Some issues such as health and safety requirements and equality of opportunity are explained well. All learners are encouraged by trainers to follow strict health and safety regulations in the workplace. At some employers, the rooms used for the background knowledge training are poorly sound insulated, and in others, the rooms are also used as a store.

40. Assessment practices are well planned and learners fully understand their progress. Trainers carry out assessments in the workplace. Learners' project work is also assessed. Some employers contribute to assessment and provide regular feedback to the trainer about the work tasks and standards achieved by the learners. Some employers, however, depend on the provider for all of the assessments. These employers have an inadequate knowledge of NVQs and the requirements of modern apprenticeships.

41. There is incomplete recording of learner's progress on the progress review forms. Some parts are not completed and others include poorly detailed comments that do not provide appropriate information for the learner. This has been identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. The progress reviews are thorough and conducted appropriately, but the judgements, advice and targets in the documents do not reflect this. The provider has made changes recently to tackle this issue, but it is too early to make a judgement on its effectiveness.

42. Arrangements to assess learners' literacy and numeracy skills during their induction are satisfactory. However, inadequate use is made of this initial assessment. This weakness was identified in the self-assessment report. For example, the results of the initial assessments are not incorporated into learners' individual learning plans. There have been very recent changes to strengthen initial assessment and changes have been made to the individual learning plan to cover basic skills learning needs. It is too early to judge the effectiveness of these new arrangements.

Leadership and management

43. Learners have a good understanding of equality of opportunity issues. The learner's notes include informative and interesting literature on equality of opportunity. The trainers provide well-organised training sessions and have good working relationships with employers. The employers make good use of trainers' expertise to ensure the progress of their learners.