

# REINSPECTION REPORT

## **Alliance Learning Limited Reinspection**

**13 May 2004**



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 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
- 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.

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## **Alliance Learning Limited Reinspection**

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## REINSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Alliance Learning Limited (AL) is a private company limited by guarantee and a registered charity managed by a group of member companies. It was formed in April 2001 from the merger of two training providers. The company has three training centres in Bolton, Bury, and Wigan, and a head office in Horwich. AL employs 93 staff and provides work-based learning for 544 young people and 444 adults on an employer training pilot (ETP) scheme. Learners work towards foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation and health, social care and public services. The training is funded through contracts with the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council.

2. In March 2004, the unemployment rate in Bolton was 2.5 per cent, compared with 2.4 per cent in England. According to the 2001 census, the proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups was 11 per cent in Bolton, compared with 9 per cent in England.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. AL provides training in manufacturing, and general and motor vehicle engineering. There is an ETP programme, which is designed to deliver NVQs to employed adults. There are 321 learners on engineering training programmes, recruited directly from employers, Connexions, and in response to advertisements. AL has a department responsible for recruitment and the initial assessment of learners. It tests learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills and, where appropriate, carries out initial testing for key skills. There are 166 advanced modern apprentices, 115 foundation modern apprentices and 40 learners on other NVQ programmes. Most learners attend the training centre on day release or on a 16-week block release to complete their NVQ at level 2 in engineering and, where applicable, their key skills units. The remaining learners complete all aspects of their training in the workplace. Learners on general engineering and manufacturing training programmes complete the required vocational qualifications in the training centre. Subcontracted tutors attend the training centre to provide training towards these qualifications. Motor vehicle learners attend another subcontractor's premises for background knowledge, practical training and testing. On completion of the NVQ at level 2, advanced modern apprentices continue level 3 frameworks in the workplace. They attend the training centre by day or block release. AL provides further support for the learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills, and key skills, in two-hour sessions two evenings a week. There are 16 vocationally qualified engineering staff, all of

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whom are qualified as NVQ work-based assessors and four as internal verifiers, with another member of staff working towards this award. Work-based assessors visit learners at work every four to six weeks to carry out progress reviews.

### **Business administration, management & professional**

4. AL has 103 learners on business administration, management and professional training courses. There are two advanced modern apprentices, 28 foundation modern apprentices, 67 ETP learners and six learners working towards NVQs at level 2. All learners are employed. Foundation modern apprentices and advanced modern apprentices can start their training at any time of the year. There are training centres in Horwich, Bolton, Bury and Leigh. Training is provided for ETP's learners in the workplace. Foundation modern apprentices attend one of the training centres for a day or half a day each week for four out of five weeks. If necessary, lessons provide the learners with support towards the technical certificate, key skills, or literacy, numeracy and language skills. Modern apprentices can be referred to AL by Connexions or can apply directly. ETP's learners are referred by Business Link. There are four learning and development officers, all of whom are assessors and three of them are also internal verifiers.

### **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

5. AL provides training for 49 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation. Two are advanced modern apprentices, 12 are foundation modern apprentices and 35 are working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. There are 192 learners on the ETP programme. Of these, 160 learners are working towards NVQs at level 2 in specialised plant and machinery operations, which is a new training programme introduced since the previous inspection, and 32 learners are working towards NVQs at level 2 in customer service. One subcontractor manages most specialised plant and machinery operations training. Most of the learners on this training programme are with one employer. ETP learners are referred to AL from the northwest Business Link. Other learners are recruited through Connexions and the sales and recruitment team at AL's head office. All learners are employed in a variety of large and small retailing, office and warehouse companies.

## Health, social care & public services

6. AL has 178 learners working towards NVQs in care and early years care and education. Of these, 62 are advanced modern apprentices, 62 are foundation modern apprentices and 54 are enrolled on NVQ-only courses. AL also has 145 learners enrolled on an ETP programme who are working towards NVQs at level 2 in early years care and education and care. AL provides this training at its Leigh and Bury offices. All learners have employed status and work within local nurseries, schools, residential and nursing homes, home care agencies and supported living services within private and local authority provision. Members of the care and childcare team interview all learners. Employers are also interviewed to establish and agree this commitment and responsibilities to the training programme. Learners attend a two-day induction course that covers topics relating to health and safety, and equality and diversity. All learners complete an initial diagnostic assessment for literacy and numeracy. Additional support is available for these skills, and any other support issues that arise, through the skills development team and the learning and employment support officer.

## ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	11
Number of inspection days	46
Number of learner interviews	91
Number of staff interviews	60
Number of employer interviews	38
Number of subcontractor interviews	6
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	14
Number of visits	42

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. At the time of the previous inspection the provision in retailing, customer service and transportation was satisfactory. The provision in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, health, social care and public services was unsatisfactory. Leadership and management and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. Arrangements for equality of opportunity were satisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects were found to be good, except for the retailing, customer service and transportation area of learning which is satisfactory.

## GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

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

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

<b>Health, social care &amp; public services</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

Grades awarded at reinspection

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

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality assurance	2

<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
Other government-funded provision	3

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Other government-funded provision	3
Work-based learning for young people	2



Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Other government-funded provision	4
Work-based learning for young people	2

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
Other government-funded provision	3

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

8. There are satisfactory retention and achievement rates in all of the occupational areas, except in motor vehicle programmes which remain unsatisfactory. **Learners on the ETP programme in business administration, management and professional are making good progress. However, there is slow progress being made by most specialised plant and machinery operations learners.**

9. **Learners in engineering, technology and manufacturing achieve a high standard of work in the training centre and in the workplace.** Work done during off-the-job training develops good skills, often producing useful tools.

10. **On business administration, management and professional programmes there is good skills development.** Learners are developing good skills in the workplace and at the training centre. Learners achieve additional qualifications in subjects such as information technology (IT), first aid, health and safety, equality and diversity, telephone techniques and customer care.

### Quality of education and training

11. All learning sessions observed were judged to be satisfactory or better.

12. **There are good assessment practices in business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services.** There is thorough and detailed preparation and planning at every stage of the assessment process. Learners are fully involved in preparation for their assessments. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods including workplace observations and professional discussions using audiotapes. Learners' portfolios are well

presented and clearly referenced throughout.

**13. There is particularly effective involvement by employers in retailing, customer service and transportation, and health, social care and public services.** Employers are very enthusiastic and supportive of learners in the workplace. They help to motivate learners to progress towards their qualification. Employers allow time in the workplace for learners to work on their portfolios and complete work that is set for them by the assessors.

**14. There are very effective progress review processes on all training programmes.** Since the previous inspection, the review paperwork and process has been completely re-developed. The document is now comprehensive and covers all components of the modern apprenticeship framework. Targets are set and reviewed during assessment visits which take place in between progress reviews. Progression against the units is recorded. Comments are gathered from all parties involved in the progress review process. Equal opportunities is discussed at each progress review and learners are asked questions on equal opportunities topics. All parties receive a copy of the review paperwork after each visit. On the progress review paperwork, there is a section to record action-planning. Targets are set and reviewed at each visit. These targets help to drive forward the progression of the learners.

**15. There is very good support for learners.** All learners are allocated to an assessor who visits each learner for a significant amount of time each month. Assessors help learners with personal and social problems as well as supporting them to achieve their qualification. Additional learning needs identified at induction are assessed individually and individual support is provided by each learner's assessor and the learning and employment support officer. Assessors are easily accessible, contactable, work flexibly and are responsive to learners' needs.

**16. Key skills effectively form an integral part of most training programmes.** Key skills are part of the programme from induction onwards and are enthusiastically delivered using occupationally relevant materials. The key skills facilitator also supports the learning and development officers to relate their sessions and assignments effectively to all appropriate key skills components. AL ensures workplaces are aware of learners' training programmes and timetables. **However, there is some slow assessment of key skills in engineering, technology and manufacturing and business administration, management and professional.**

**17. There has been a marked improvement in the provision of literacy, numeracy and language and key skills support for learners.** Learners with identified support needs for literacy and numeracy can either attend special lessons at the training centres or receive support in the workplace from their assessor.

**18. Assessment and internal verification of the specialist machinery and plant operations NVQ is poor.** The assessment records in all portfolios are identical. The assessment does not illustrate the individual competences of each learner. The assessment decisions are exactly the same for all learners and the recommendations are general. Assessment

decisions are not linked to the NVQ standards. Learners' progress on the programme is slow. Some learners have not had contact with their assessor for a period of up to four months. Learners interviewed are losing interest in the training programme. They are unable to see that they have made progress. Internal verification processes have not yet fully taken place and records are inadequate.

**19. The use of resources in health, social care and public services is limited.** There is a range of resources including books, videos, craft materials, demonstration equipment and professional magazines. However resources are not always easy for learners to use or access. There is a reliance on photocopied materials to accompany each unit delivered. These materials are difficult for learners to use because of poor quality photocopying. Learners are not helped to access resources, for instance by being given reading lists or relevant internet sites for their assignments and individual research.

### Leadership and management

**20. There are extensive and useful links with employers and other organisations.** AL participates in effective training partnerships and has useful links with other agencies. These activities benefit potential and existing learners. The company has good links with many employers and other training providers in north Manchester. It also works constructively with local schools.

**21. Communications are effective.** There is good communication between AL and its employers. Employers are well informed of learners' progress and are supportive of the modern apprenticeship programmes. There are good internal communications. Senior managers meet with the divisional executive manager every week to review progress of the individual learners in each area of learning. Managers meet individually with their staff every month to review progress of learners and discuss general concerns. There are regular team meetings and the chief executive briefs all staff every two months on the company's progress towards its objectives.

**22. The performance of the programmes is well managed.** At the previous inspection the management of training was a weakness. The monitoring of programme performance has improved significantly. Many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been improved. Some of the weaknesses are now strengths. All staff have frequent and effective individual meetings with their line manager to review learners' progress and identify areas for improvement. During these sessions any staff training and development needs are identified and this is provided in a timely manner. All key processes are reviewed and managers quickly highlight patterns and trends of good practice and under-performance.

**23. AL promotes equality of opportunity to learners.** Equality of opportunity is appropriately covered during induction and is reinforced through progress reviews. Recently equal opportunities themes have been incorporated in reviews leading to better exploration of equal opportunities issues. Equal opportunities topics are also discussed fully when they arise in learning sessions. For example, in one business and administration class a discussion on language barriers led to an exploration of

discrimination. Learners have challenged practices and values in their workplaces. They have increased confidence with equality and diversity topics. AL has engaged in a number of initiatives to improve the promotion of its training programmes to minority ethnic communities. The promotion of equality of opportunity in the workplace has improved since the previous inspection. New equal opportunities guidance notes have been produced for employers, including information about how to deal with harassment and bullying. Advice is offered to employers on equality of opportunity if necessary. Questionnaires on equality and diversity are sent to employers every six months. These are collated and are used as a basis for action plans which are monitored.

**24. The company's quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive.** They are clearly documented and cover all key aspects of the training process well. Staff have a good understanding of current quality assurance arrangements. At the previous inspection procedures were in place to assure the quality of recruitment, initial assessment, induction, assessment and progress reviews. Observation of teaching and learning, progress reviews and assessments have been considerably strengthened since the previous inspection. They are carried out systematically and are well recorded. The company develops action plans based on the outcome of the observations. The action plans are well monitored in the organisation and with subcontractors by heads of departments and executive managers.

**25. AL has a good focus on continuous improvement.** At the previous inspection, AL had weak quality assurance procedures that only focused on audits of compliance. The company has since revised its quality assurance procedures to ensure a good focus on continuous quality improvement. Qualitative audits which monitor the quality of information recorded on all forms have been introduced alongside audits to monitor the company's compliance to its contracts.

**26. There are undemanding targets set for the recruitment of under-represented groups.** The target for the proportion of learners from minority ethnic groups is 5 per cent. This is significantly less than the representation of minority ethnic groups in the main catchment area of Bolton, which is 11 per cent. The target for the proportion of women recruited to engineering is 3 per cent and for men into non-traditional occupational areas is 20 per cent. Currently 4 per cent of learners are from a minority ethnic group, 1 per cent of engineering learners are women and 8 per cent of care learners are men.

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

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- extensive and useful links with employers and other organisations
- effective communications
- good performance management
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity to learners and employers

- comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- good focus on continuous improvement

### **Weaknesses**

- undemanding targets for the recruitment of under-represented groups

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### **Strengths**

- good work produced by learners
- good use of key skills in the workplace
- particularly effective monitoring of programmes
- very effective progress review process
- very good support for learners

### **Weaknesses**

- some weak assessment practice
- poor retention and achievement rates on motor vehicle foundation modern apprenticeship programmes

## **Business administration, management & professional**

### **Strengths**

- good progress on ETP programme
- good skills development
- good assessment practices
- very effective progress reviews on modern apprenticeship programmes
- very good support for learners

### **Weaknesses**

- slow progress for some foundation modern apprentices who started in 2002-03
- poor IT resources

## **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

### **Strengths**

- good supportive employers
- effective use of progress reviews
- good assessment practices

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- good support for learners

#### **Weaknesses**

- poor assessment and internal verification in specialist machine plant operations at one subcontractor
- slow assessment of some key skills portfolios

#### **Health, social care & public services**

#### **Strengths**

- effective employer involvement
- good support for learners
- effective integration of key skills
- very good progress review processes
- good assessment practices

#### **Weaknesses**

- limited use of resources

## DETAILED REINSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 2**

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

#### **Strengths**

- extensive and useful links with employers and other organisations
- effective communications
- good performance management
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity to learners and employers
- comprehensive quality assurance arrangements
- good focus on continuous improvement

#### **Weaknesses**

- undemanding targets for the recruitment of under-represented groups

27. AL participates in effective training partnerships and has useful links with other organisations, which benefit potential and existing learners. The company has good links with many employers and other training providers in north Manchester, and also works constructively with local schools. For example, it is involved in giving presentations to promote modern apprenticeships and opportunities for taster days in engineering.

28. There is good communication between AL and its employers. Employers are well informed of learners' progress and are supportive of the modern apprenticeships. There are good internal communications. Managers meet every week with the divisional executive manager in order to review the progress of individual learners within each area of learning. Managers meet their staff individually each month to review learners' progress and discuss general issues. There are regular team meetings and the chief executive briefs all staff every two months on the company's progress towards its objectives. Staff are well informed of their individual progress and the company's overall development.

29. At the previous inspection the management of training was a weakness. Since the previous inspection, several new managers have joined AL. The monitoring of programme performance has improved significantly. There is an improvement in many of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection, some of which are now strengths. All staff have a frequent and effective individual session with their managers in order to review learners' progress and identify areas for improvement. During these sessions, any staff training and development needs are identified and this is provided in a timely manner. There are desktop reviews of all key processes and managers quickly highlight patterns and trends of good practice and under-performance.

30. The staff appraisal process is satisfactory. Staff have annual appraisals and six-monthly progress reviews, which are used to set individual targets and training priorities.

31. There are satisfactory strategic and business planning processes. Since the previous inspection appropriate targets have been set, particularly for retention and achievement across all areas of learning, which were a significant weakness. All areas of learning now have satisfactory rates of retention and achievement, except for specialist plant and machine operations and motor vehicle learners.

32. The use of data is satisfactory. AL uses management information reports routinely, so that managers can readily monitor the progress of training programmes.

33. The board effectively supervises the company's strategic direction. Since the previous inspection, the board has formed a finance and general purpose committee which meets every two months and closely monitors the company's risks and finances.

34. At the time of the previous inspection the arrangements for the teaching of literacy, numeracy and language skills were inadequate. These are now satisfactory. AL carries out diagnostic testing of all learners' literacy and numeracy skills. If required, specialist practitioners that have been recruited since the previous inspection provide learners with support. Learners who require additional English language skills are referred to a local college of further education.

## **Equality of opportunity**

## **Contributory grade 2**

35. AL is taking effective action to promote equal opportunities to learners and employers. Equality of opportunity is covered appropriately during the induction and is reinforced through reviews. Recently, equal opportunities themes have been incorporated in learners' progress reviews, leading to better exploration of equal opportunities issues. For example, in one care review, the topic of sexual harassment was well covered and led to a meaningful discussion with the learner. Equal opportunities issues are also discussed fully as they arise in learning sessions. In one business and administration class a discussion on language barriers led to an exploration of discrimination. Learners are confident with equality and diversity issues and have challenged practices and values in their workplaces. AL has engaged in a number of initiatives to better market its training programmes to minority ethnic communities, such as placing advertisements in the relevant newspapers. The company has established good relations with an increasing number of minority ethnic community groups. Leaflets with positive images have also been produced in community languages. The company has a new set of posters intended to challenge and provoke the discussion of equality and diversity issues. These initiatives, together with the work of the retention officer, have significantly raised the learners' awareness of bullying. The promotion of equal opportunities in workplaces has improved since the previous inspection. New guidance notes have been produced for employers on equal opportunities, diversity, harassment and bullying. If necessary, AL offers advice to employers on equal of opportunity. Each year, the company sends questionnaires on equality and diversity to employers. AL



collates these, develops action plans and then monitors them.

36. The company has satisfactory equal opportunities policies and procedures. The equal opportunities statement covers aspects of training, assessment and complaints, as well as the responsibilities of employers and subcontractors. An implementation policy has recently been added, which outlines key responsibilities at different levels of the company. Data on the participation of under-represented groups is monitored appropriately through the key performance indicators. The disability statement is satisfactory. AL has developed a new strategy and policy for widening the participation of learners from under-represented groups and is in the process of implementing it. The company has a policy on harassment and bullying which has a statement of aims and definitions. However, it does not sufficiently deal with the growth in recorded bullying incidences. Since June 2003 there have been nine cases of bullying, which have been dealt with effectively but not recorded formally or reported adequately.

37. Targets for equal opportunities are undemanding. The target for minority ethnic learners is 5 per cent. This is significantly less than the minority ethnic groups in the main catchment area of Bolton, which is 11 per cent. Forty-five per cent of employers who responded to the equality and diversity survey had staff from minority ethnic groups. The target for women into engineering is 3 per cent and for men into non-traditional occupational areas it is 20 per cent. Currently, 4 per cent of learners are from a minority ethnic group and 1 per cent of engineering learners are female and 8 per cent of care learners are male.

## Quality assurance

## Contributory grade 2

38. The company's quality assurance arrangements are comprehensive, clearly documented and cover all key aspects of the training process well. Staff have a good understanding of current arrangements. At the previous inspection, there were procedures to assure the quality of recruitment, initial assessment, induction, assessment, and reviews. Observation of teaching and learning, reviews and assessments have been considerably strengthened since the previous inspection. They are carried out systematically and are well recorded. They are action planned and monitored closely, both within the company and with subcontractors. Additionally, procedures for feedback from stakeholders have been broadened. Questionnaires are issued to employers and learners every six months. These are supplemented with telephone surveys of 10 per cent of employers in each occupational area. The results are collated and posted on noticeboards, which are easily accessible for learners and staff. The company has also developed some new quality assurance policies. A new self-assessment policy outlines the intended process and a teaching and learning policy has also been written to support the new observation arrangements.

39. At the previous inspection, AL had weak quality assurance procedures that only focused on audits of compliance. The company has since revised its quality assurance procedures to ensure a good focus on continuous improvement. Qualitative audits, which monitor the quality of information recorded on all forms, have been introduced alongside audits to check for compliance. There is good systematic monitoring of action

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plans throughout the company. For example, action plans arising from the quality assurance audits are monitored by the monthly quality forum and colour coded if actions exceed their previous date. Actions arising out of observation of learning are monitored closely by heads of departments and executive managers, and have led to swift interventions, including staff dismissal, to improve the quality of the training provision. Over the past year the company has had a major focus on improving the quality of learners' progress reviews and the quality of key skills training. Reviews are now a key strength in all the areas of learning and there is good improvement in key skills and literacy, numeracy and English language skills in care and engineering. Key performance indicators now measure achievement, retention and learners' progress. These are available to all staff and are monitored every month by the quality forum for improvement trends.

40. Internal verification is satisfactory. AL has developed thorough systems. Assessments are part of the observation process and lead to good feedback and action-planning. There is an appropriate sample of assessed work and external verification reports are good. However, there is some poor internal verification practice in specialist plant and machinery operations and motor vehicle NVQs.

41. At the previous inspection, the company's monitoring of subcontractors was weak. The arrangements are now satisfactory. New contracts have been issued which state clearly the responsibilities of each party. Regular, minuted meetings take place and performance is monitored closely. Subcontractors are included in the company's observation of training and learners' feedback procedures, which have led to some changes and improvements. However, one new subcontractor has only recently been included in these arrangements and assessment and internal verification there are unsatisfactory.

42. Self-assessment is satisfactory. A new self-assessment policy has been produced which clearly outlines the process. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. However, other key stakeholders, such as learners, employers and subcontractors are informed of the outcomes but not involved in the development of the self-assessment report.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

### Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	281	2
Other government-funded provision	40	3

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

#### Strengths

- good work produced by learners
- good use of key skills in the workplace
- particularly effective monitoring of programmes
- very effective progress review process
- very good support for learners

#### Weaknesses

- some weak assessment practice
- poor retention and achievement rates on motor vehicle foundation modern apprenticeship programmes

### Achievement and standards

43. At the previous inspection there was slow progress towards achieving NVQs, basic skills and key skills. Retention rates on advanced modern apprenticeships are improving. In 2002-03 the retention rate was 66 per cent, and 93 per cent of learners starting in 2003-04 have remained in training. The retention rates for foundation modern apprentices are also improving. In 2002-03, 45 per cent of learners were retained and currently the retention rate for learners starting in 2003-04 is 77 per cent. Retention rates for learners on the ETP programme in engineering is satisfactory at 75 per cent. Learners receive much support from both the provider and their employers. Progress is good in some workplaces and slower in others. Learners who speak English as an additional language experience some difficulties with technical language communication. AL is working with others involved in this pilot to provide interpreters and written support as required. It is too early in the programme to judge achievement rates.

44. There is clear improvement in achievement rates on all youth programmes except for motor vehicle programmes which remain unsatisfactory. Achievements rates for learners on NVQ-only programmes are satisfactory at 64 per cent in 2000-01. The modern apprenticeship learners have made significant progress in achieving units during

2004, but this has yet to have a significant impact on framework completion rates.

45. Retention and achievement rates on foundation modern apprenticeship motor vehicle programmes are poor. Of the learners who started in 2002-03, seven are still in learning and of those starting in 2003-04, 40 per cent are still in learning. No learners have completed the framework since the programme started in 1998. The only NVQ achievement has been by two learners who started in 2001-02 who have achieved an NVQ at level 2.

### **Quality of education and training**

46. Learners achieve a high standard of work in the training centre and in the workplace. Off-the-job training develops learners' skills well. They often produce useful tools. Employers allow learners to experience a wide range of work in the early stages of training. Learners interviewed appreciate and welcome this approach. On most programmes, learners quickly develop skills to start to work effectively with only limited supervision.

47. Many NVQ portfolios are excellent except those for the motor vehicle programme, where they are satisfactory. Much of the evidence produced is computer generated. This significantly improves the presentation of learners' work and aids the development of their key skills in IT. Extensive use is made of digital images which are supplemented by learners' own notes. Evidence is clearly cross-referenced to the NVQ standards. Most employers allow learners to develop their portfolios during working hours.

48. At the previous inspection, the development of key skills with learners was poor. Key skills are now introduced early in the programme and form an integral part of the work-based learning curriculum. There are examples of learners using assessments from their NVQ programmes as evidence for key skills.

49. The systems for and implementation of progress monitoring are very effective. Management information systems used to monitor learners' progress have been significantly improved. New systems have been developed for this purpose and it was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. The systems have been fully applied throughout the engineering provision. All assessors keep up-to-date records of learners' progress. Information is routinely recorded on the management information system. A colour coding system is used to raise managers' awareness to slow progress and identify those learners whose performance does not meet the requirements of the programme. Remedial action is taken in areas of concern; staff interview learners and action plans are developed for them. Individual monthly meetings take place between assessors and managers, providing in-depth reviews of learners' progress and performance.

50. Progress reviews were poor during the previous inspection. Recent measures to improve the effectiveness of reviews have been particularly successful. The review paperwork has been redesigned and is now thorough. All aspects of the programme are now monitored and commented upon during progress reviews. Performance targets set

are now both measurable and challenging. In most cases, there is good involvement of the employer during progress review visits. Feedback on learners' progress is now routinely sought from employers. In-depth discussions now take place regarding the collection of current work-based evidence and assessment opportunities. Individual learning plans are regularly updated to reflect learners' progress. Reinforcement of equal opportunities and health and safety is good, with open questions effectively covering key topics.

51. Support for learners is very good. Employers are very supportive of learners' training. AL has many effective partnerships with employers and providers, which benefit learners. Learners are encouraged to participate in a wide range of engineering disciplines. Work-based learning activities often exceed the requirements of the NVQ. Learners complete work activities under the guidance and supervision of qualified and experienced supervisors. Work schedules are often adjusted to allow learners to participate in more complex tasks. There are good opportunities to collect work-based evidence. Some employers encourage learners to develop additional skills and qualifications. These additional skills offer learners greater scope for career progression. Work-based assessors visit learners regularly. All learners interviewed speak highly of their on-the-job training and the support provided by employers.

52. Learners now receive satisfactory support in literacy, numeracy and English language. This was identified as being unsatisfactory at the previous inspection. Many older learners had poor qualifications and were unable to meet the literacy and numeracy requirements of the modern apprenticeship framework. Recruitment screening and entry requirements are now thorough. Learners complete a diagnostic test and an occupationally specific initial assessment as part of the induction to their training programme. This induction is now more memorable to learners and they are now more engaged during training sessions. Initial assessment information is entered onto a table, which identifies learners and the support they require. Additional learning needs in literacy, numeracy and language are assessed. Learners receive a work pack relevant to their individual additional support needs. Additional literacy and numeracy skills training is delivered at the training centre. Where employers are unable to release learners for literacy and numeracy training, support sessions are incorporated in their off-the-job training sessions. Visits to learners in the workplace for literacy and numeracy support are now more frequent. Assessors provide additional support when they are able to. Specialist teachers often accompany assessors on workplace visits. The number of staff allocated to literacy and numeracy training is now satisfactory. One teacher who recently left the company is to be replaced as a priority. There is insufficient good-quality computers or reliable classroom resources to support training. The newer computers in the centre are allocated for different training programmes and are not always available to engineering work-based learners.

53. At the previous inspection, assessment in the training centre was identified as a strength. Assessment is now satisfactory in most cases. Appropriate use is made of observations and witness testimony for identifying assessment opportunities in the workplace. Learners' and employers' understanding of the NVQ requirements is good. Learners and employers appreciate the guidance and support given to help them

progress through the qualification.

54. Off-the-job training is satisfactory. Practical tasks increase progressively in complexity and learners develop a good range of skills. Assessments are planned into training programmes. Learners are well informed of this process. Detailed descriptions are given of the standards required before assessment. Thorough questioning reinforces learners' understanding of assessment. Learners are given feedback on their performance and development. The learner and assessor discuss and agree remedial action.

55. Overall resources are satisfactory. Machine tools are old but are fit for purpose. Some classrooms are small, limiting the range of teaching aids used. Staff are vocationally experienced and longer-term staff are well qualified in teaching and assessment. New staff are able to use their recent experiences to good advantage and are qualified or working towards assessor and teaching qualifications.

56. The assessment of some key skills is weak. Learners complete evidence portfolios to a good standard, however continuous assessment is not always carried out or effectively recorded. Some learners due for key skills tests have not had project work assessed or discussed. Learners are unsure how to meet the requirements of their qualification.

57. Assessment of learners on the motor vehicle course is not always recorded at appropriate stages of the programme. Learners gather evidence early but assessments are not routinely carried out during the first six months of the programme. Many learners have enough experience to gain unit accreditation after three months of being on the training programme.

## **Leadership and management**

58. There was poor management of on-the-job training at the previous inspection. AL has effectively remedied this weakness. There are now observations of training carried out by AL's staff and there is better co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Progress has been made to ensure that the learning in the training centre more effectively supports techniques learnt in the workplace.

59. The management team is committed to the continuous improvement of the training provision. Ideas for improvement are implemented, trials completed and appropriate changes made to training delivery. Communications are now more formal between management and training staff. Meetings are arranged with assessors and they are effective. There is frequent and ongoing discussion about the implementation of improvements. There are particularly effective and progressive links with other training providers, awarding bodies and employers. Internal verification is satisfactory in this area of learning, with good staff development for new assessors. A wide range of appropriate courses and assessor qualifications are identified and delivered. However, internal verification of motor vehicle programmes is weak. There is no distinction between monitoring visits and final quality checks of portfolios by internal verifiers

60. The self-assessment report accurately describes the company and is written in response to the 'Common Inspection Framework'. The strengths of the company were identified but understated; however, some weak practices in assessment and internal verification were not identified.

61. There are satisfactory systems in place to gain feedback from learners and employers. Questionnaires are issued at various stages of the programme to evaluate induction, and on- and off-the-job training. Learners demonstrate a good understanding of equality of opportunity following their induction training. They are well aware of the complaints and appeals procedures. There is good reinforcement of equality of opportunity and health and safety during progress reviews. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted, through informative posters and leaflets in the training centre, classrooms and workshops.



**Business administration, management & professional****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other government-funded provision	67	3
Work-based learning for young people	36	2

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

**Strengths**

- good progress on ETP programme
- good skills development
- good assessment practices
- very effective progress reviews on modern apprenticeship programmes
- very good support for learners

**Weaknesses**

- slow progress for some foundation modern apprentices who started in 2002-03
- poor IT resources

**Achievement and standards**

62. There is good progress on ETP programmes. Retention rates across ETP programmes are 74 per cent. In the current year 17 per cent of learners have already achieved their qualification. The rest of the learners are on target to complete significantly ahead of their planned end date. Achievement rates are satisfactory for modern apprenticeships with many learners having completed the framework recently. The trend of achievement over the past four years is greatly improved. However, there is still slow progress for some foundation modern apprentices starting in 2002-03. Traditionally, key skills were assessed at the end of the training programme. Nine foundation modern apprentices reached the end of their funded training programmes before completing all the aspects of the framework. Current progress is now satisfactory. Retention rates for the foundation modern apprenticeship programme is showing a marked improvement.

63. Learners are developing good skills during on- and off-the-job training. Learners achieve additional qualifications in subjects such as IT, first aid, health and safety, equality and diversity, telephone techniques and customer care. One learner has been trained by her employer for a position of responsibility as a fire marshal and has already demonstrated her skills in fire drills. Two employers mentioned an improvement in learners' telephone techniques. Other employers reported marked improvements in learners' morale and teamwork.



## Quality of education and training

64. AL continues to demonstrate good assessment practices, as at the previous inspection. There is thorough and detailed preparation and planning at every stage of the assessment process. Learners are fully involved in preparation for their assessments. Assessors use a good range of assessment methods, including workplace observations and professional discussions using audiotapes. Learners' portfolios are well presented and clearly referenced throughout. Learners understand the framework requirements and are able to effectively present evidence to demonstrate their competence and progress. Employers or workplace supervisors are involved in the process and understand exactly where learners are up to and what is expected of them. For new modern apprentices, key skills form an integral part of the training programme from the start of it.

65. In some ETP workplaces assessors do not always take full advantage of assessment opportunities where a number of learners are based on one site. There are very effective progress reviews on modern apprenticeship training programmes. Progress reviews are detailed and thorough. Action plans and previous progress reviews are discussed at the start of each progress review. All aspects of the modern apprenticeship programme are discussed and recorded, for example health and safety, equality and diversity, basic and key skills, NVQ units and technical certificates. Comments recorded on the equality section of the paperwork arise from discussions around different topics and detail the learner's knowledge and understanding. The second part of the progress review is an action plan that includes targets for completion of parts of the programme. Learners and their supervisors are left with copies of all the agreed actions and know exactly what needs to be achieved by the deadlines. The progress review systems for ETP learners are less detailed and thorough but are adequate to meet the requirements of the programme.

66. Support for learners is very good. Learning and development officers make frequent visits to work placements to carry out reviews and assessments. There is a clear distinction between these two activities. Sufficient time is allowed to cover any support requirements identified by learners or employers. Learners are well matched to their work placements. In one example the employer has changed the work content of a learner's role to enable her to carry out the supervisory requirements of an advanced modern apprenticeship. Most employers support learners by allowing time for study during working hours work and encourage learners to attend day-release sessions at AL. A welfare officer interviews all learners and is contacted when concerns are raised. Learners identified as being at risk of leaving the programme early without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan have been supported through difficulties and remained on the programme. Possible problems are recognised early using a colour coded system of green, amber and red markers on learners' files to help the learning and development officers identify the level of the problem. Problems are dealt with promptly by either a learning and development officer or the welfare officer.

67. Off-the-job training is well structured and well attended. There are schemes of work and lesson plans for all sessions. A variety of teaching methods are used and these are

supported by good-quality handouts and visual aids. All schemes of work, lesson plans and training materials are quality assured by the head of department. Timetables of lessons are made available well in advance for all learners and employers. Lessons include organisational development, the importance of planning work effectively and methods of improving performance in the workplace. These sessions provide learners with thorough preparation for the technical certificates. All learners entered for end tests have successfully achieved their technical certificates.

68. There has been a marked improvement in the support for learners' literacy, numeracy and language and key skills support for learners. Learners with identified literacy and numeracy support needs can either attend special lessons at the training centres or receive support in the workplace from their assessor. Key skills provision is now satisfactory and is introduced at the start of the modern apprenticeship training programmes. Induction is thorough and all learners receive an induction handbook.

69. The standard of accommodation at the training centres is satisfactory. Staff are appropriately experienced and qualified. However, IT resources are poor. For example, at one training centre there are eight computers and one printer to serve groups of up to 15 learners. These machines are old and the software is slow. Equipment often breaks down and systems cannot cope with the demands. Learners' work is often lost if not continuously saved.

## **Leadership and management**

70. There have been significant improvements in the management and co-ordination of the business administration programme since the previous inspection. Strategies have been introduced to improve retention and achievement rates. Prospective learners are asked specific business administration questions at interview and are offered work tasters before they commit to enrolment on the programme. The frequency of assessors' visits has been increased and progress review visits and assessment visits now have a different emphasis. Staff have had training in how to carry out effective progress reviews. Much work has been done to engage employers in all parts of the training programmes. There are strategies for literacy, numeracy, language and key skills support that are working effectively. Learners' awareness of equality and diversity topics is good. There are examples of equal opportunities topics beginning discussed as part of the off-the-job training session.

**Retailing, customer service & transportation****Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Other government-funded provision	192	4
Work-based learning for young people	49	2

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

**Strengths**

- good supportive employers
- effective use of progress reviews
- good assessment practices
- good support for learners

**Weaknesses**

- poor assessment and internal verification in specialist machine plant operations at one subcontractor
- slow assessment of some key skills portfolios

**Achievement and standards**

71. Since the previous inspection retention and achievement rates have improved. Of those learners starting in 2003-04, the retention rate for foundation modern apprentices is 85 per cent and for NVQ learners it is 83 per cent. All learners are making satisfactory progress. Completion of the modern apprenticeship framework has improved for those learners who joined the programme in 2002-03. Eight per cent of foundation modern apprentices have completed the framework and 50 per cent are still in learning. The achievement rate on the NVQ training programme is 31 per cent and 24 per cent of learners are still in learning. The retention rates for all learners on ETP programmes is 75 per cent which is satisfactory. It is too early to judge achievement rates for this programme, however, approximately two-thirds of learners are making slow progress.

**Quality of education and training**

72. Employers are very enthusiastic and supportive of learners in the workplace. They help to motivate learners to progress towards their qualification. Employers allow time in the workplace for learners to work on their portfolios and complete work that is set for them by the assessors. Many employers have several learners employed with them and use AL for their staff recruitment. Several learners have been promoted within their companies to supervisory positions since starting the programme. Employers are closely involved in the assessment process and contribute to the process when completing witness testimonies for NVQ units. Some employers have their own in-house training

programmes and offer courses on food hygiene and customer service. Learners use this evidence towards their qualification. AL's staff are responsive to employers' needs and work flexibly to accommodate busy periods and shift patterns.

73. Since the previous inspection, the progress review paperwork has been re-developed. The paperwork has been piloted and amended. The document is now comprehensive, covering all components of the framework. Targets are set and time bound and reviewed during assessment visits and during progress reviews. Progression against the NVQ units is recorded. Comments are gathered from all parties involved in the process. During each progress review, an equal opportunities topic is discussed with the learner, and set questions are asked. All parties receive a copy of the review paperwork. There is a section for action-planning on the progress review paperwork. Targets are set and reviewed during each visit. These targets help to drive forward the progression of the learners.

74. Assessment practice for retailing, customer service and warehousing NVQs is effective. The assessment starts with detailed action-planning. Assessment planning is agreed with employers, who make sure learners are prepared for assessment visits. Employers ensure learners are on the right shift to attend the assessment. Assessors carry out assessments in unsociable working hours. Learners' have a broad range of evidence in their portfolios. This ranges from work-based evidence to digital photographs which are annotated by the learner. The use of professional discussion on the customer service programme is extensive and accelerates the assessment process. A comprehensive structure of planning and recording supports the recording of the professional discussion process. Learners have also been videoed during assessment for communication key skills element of the modern apprenticeship. Recently, assessors have been piloting the use of a portable dictation machine during observations as well as keeping a written record of them. Employers are involved in the assessment process by providing witness testimonies for learners on the achievement of units. Assessors and internal verifiers meet every five weeks for team meetings, standardisation sessions and internal verification sampling. Internal verification is effective. There is an annual plan for internal verification, which covers all assessors and all units of qualifications. Internal verification sampling records monitor all findings and form a clear audit trail through the programmes. Feedback and actions are recorded and followed up on the next free week with assessors. Assessors share good practice during these weeks and value the opportunity for continuous staff development across programmes and key skills.

75. Learners have access to good and thorough support from the learning and employment support officer. There is a traffic light system used to identify learners who are at risk of leaving their training programme without achieving all the targets on their individual learning plan. When the learner has a red sticker it means they are a high risk of leaving the training programme. The learning and employment support officer is then asked to visit learners with red stickers. There are several examples of the learning and employment support officer having seen a learner who has then gone on to continue with the programme and progress. One learner was being bullied and after they met with the learning and employment support officer, the situation was resolved quickly. Employers have also confirmed the valuable input of the learning and employment

support officer.

76. Training sessions observed at the centre are good and have engaged learners. Learners interviewed expressed how the training sessions have helped their confidence and understanding of legislation such as the Sales of Goods Act 1979. Learners have the opportunity to work towards additional qualifications such as food hygiene, first aid, additional units, and higher level key skills at AL. Learners have access to literacy, numeracy and language training at the centre. There are dedicated tutors qualified to deliver literacy, numeracy and language training. A schedule of learning is developed at the start of the training programme following an initial diagnostic assessment. This assessment identifies the level of learners' needs and enables staff to develop an action plan for the learners. Workshops are available, and training takes place for literacy, numeracy and language, key skills, technical certificates and background knowledge for all programmes. Learners have access to the learndirect suite for development of IT skills and there is provision for the use of IT and research on the internet in the training rooms. Warehousing learners also attend workshops and receive training in stock control, health and safety and stock returns. All lesson planning is structured and has activities, overhead projectors and handouts to support the training sessions.

77. The training centre has satisfactory resources to support learners' training. A specific training pack has been purchased for the delivery of the retailing technical certificate and encompasses everything from lesson plans to overhead projectors and handouts. Customer service learners attend workshops on topics such as teamwork and working effectively with others to develop their skills and knowledge. Additionally, open learning work books are available, which can be taken to those learners that are unable to attend off-the-job training sessions.

78. Learners are employed at a variety of large and small retail outlets, offices and warehouses. All learners attend an induction, which covers health, safety and equal opportunities. Learners are introduced to the retention officer who is there to support and resolve learners' problems in the workplace. Learners complete diagnostic skills tests during their induction. Results from these tests form the basis of a training schedule where learners attend off-the-job training to develop their literacy, numeracy and key skills.

79. The assessment practice and internal verification for learners on the specialised plant and machinery operations ETP programme is poor. This provision is subcontracted. However, 19 learners are being assessed satisfactorily and are making satisfactory progress towards the NVQ at level 2. Of 160 learners that started on the ETP programme during November and December 2003, only 127 have had an assessor assigned to them. Of these, 119 have had an observed assessment in the workplace but only 58 have had any further assessment activity. They are receiving regular assessments and visits are frequent. Progress reviews also take place. Assessment on the specialised plant and machinery operations ETP has been carried out on at least three separate occasions, but the assessment records in all portfolios are identical. The assessment does not show the individual competences of each learner. The assessment decisions are exactly the same for all learners and the recommendations are general. Assessment

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decisions are not linked to the NVQ standards. Progress on the programme is slow. Some learners have not had contact with their assessor for two periods of up to four months. Learners interviewed are losing interest in the training programme. They are unable to see that they have made any progress. Internal verification processes have not yet fully taken place and records are inadequate.

80. Assessment of key skills has improved. However, there are still examples of portfolios where assessment has been slow. One learner has been on the training programme for seven months without any key skills assessment taking place.

### **Leadership and management**

81. Since the previous inspection, this area of learning has implemented many systems and processes to improve the operational management of the training programmes. Staff meet with their line managers every month. Staff are individually accountable for their own caseloads, and are set targets, which are monitored. All procedures, including those for progress reviews, training, observations of assessment and equality of opportunity, are monitored by line managers. Staff development is identified through appraisals and monitoring of performance. Learners are now achieving the qualifications more quickly than before the previous inspection.

**Health, social care & public services****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	178	2
Other government-funded provision	145	3

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

**Strengths**

- effective employer involvement
- good support for learners
- effective integration of key skills
- very good progress review processes
- good assessment practices

**Weaknesses**

- limited use of resources

**Achievement and standards**

82. At the previous inspection, only 6 per cent of advanced modern apprentices and 2 per cent of foundation modern apprentices had completed the modern apprenticeship framework since April 2002. Retention rates were also poor at the previous inspection. Since then the organisation has remedied this weakness. The introduction of a learning and employment support officer, the appointment of a dedicated key skills facilitator and the introduction of an effective progress review system has increased retention and achievement rates. Retention rates are currently 84 per cent on the foundation modern apprenticeship programmes, 88 per cent on advanced modern apprenticeship programmes and 95 per cent for NVQ programmes. Achievement rates have also increased on foundation modern apprenticeship programmes from 13 per cent in 2001-02 to 58 per cent in 2002-03. Achievement rates on advanced modern apprenticeship programmes have increased to 33 per cent in 2002-03. Substantial numbers of learners are successfully achieving the key skills qualifications and completing the modern apprenticeship.

**Quality of education and training**

83. Relationships with employers are very good. Employers interviewed state that AL's staff are professional, good communicators and that they receive regular updating. Employers are an integral part of the progress review process and value their involvement. The processes which support learners' progress are integral to the training programme and are effective. Good reinforcement and training in equality of



opportunity is provided. A number of care learners have challenged poor working practices in the workplace. Employers interviewed regard this as an example of the impact the progress review system has had on learners' values and confidence. Employers contribute to action-planning and assessment planning and have a good understanding of the requirements of the framework. Employers and workplace supervisors work with AL's staff to ensure that learners are able to develop their practical skills.

84. There is good support for learners throughout their training programme. All learners are allocated to an assessor who visits each learner for a significant amount of time each month. Assessors help learners with personal and social problems as well as supporting them to achieve their qualification. Additional learning needs identified at induction are assessed individually and individual support is provided by the learner's assessor and the learning and employment support officer. Assessors are easily contactable, work flexibly and are responsive to learners' needs. The close relationships between assessors and learners helps to build learners' confidence and self-esteem. Learners value the support they receive and recognise that it helps them to stay in learning and achieve their learning goals. Employers report that the assessors are reliable, that they can be contacted and that they value AL's work.

85. Key skills form an integral part of all the training programmes from induction onwards and are enthusiastically delivered using occupationally relevant materials. The key skills facilitator also supports the learning and development officers to relate their sessions and assignments effectively to the appropriate key skills components. AL ensures employers are aware of learners' training programmes and timetables. For example, one employer described how key skills requirements had been carefully explained by the learning and development officer.

86. There are very good progress review processes which monitor learners' progress. Challenging targets are set for learners and they clearly identify what actions the learner needs to take. Key skills and technical certificate requirements, targets and achievements are clearly identified. All progress reviews are well planned and well structured and involve the employer. All progress reviews include a discussion of equality of opportunity, health and safety, and employers' rights and responsibilities. Learners' support requirements for literacy and numeracy are identified and their progress is monitored between progress reviews.

87. Assessments are well planned and detailed, with particularly good involvement by learners. Learners complete an action plan before each assessment, which outlines the resources needed to complete the assessment, including time and input from workplace staff. A variety of assessment methods is used to assess learners' competences. Direct observation by the assessor is recorded in detail and is clearly linked to the NVQ standards. Learners receive prompt and constructive feedback on assessment outcomes. They also have good support for portfolio-building and collecting evidence. There is an easy-to-follow monitoring document that clearly illustrates the learners' progress towards the achievement of the NVQ. There is an holistic approach to assessment.



88. Internal verification is thorough and effective. There is a clear monitoring sheet for the sampling of assessment activity. Internal verification samples discrete areas of assessors' practice such as observation and background knowledge. There are regular recorded observations of assessors' practice and detailed feedback is given to assessors on the validity of their assessments. The internal verifier also gathers feedback from learners to establish their satisfaction with the assessment process. There are monthly assessor meetings which are activity-based and are used to standardise practice. There is effective communication within the team to enable them to share best practice and resolve areas of concern quickly.

89. The induction process is well structured, memorable and effective. Learners are given a two-day induction to the company and the training programme. All learners complete an application form, are interviewed and take an initial assessment. The induction enables learners to understand the requirements of the NVQ and the appeals and complaints procedures and their rights and responsibilities. It provides a good foundation for learners' training programmes. All learners clearly remember their induction and are able to recall the information provided. They are aware of equal opportunities and the appeals and complaints procedures. This has been greatly improved since the previous inspection.

90. Off-the-job training is well structured and well planned. Learners' individual needs are generally met. Learners are taught the required background knowledge and practical skills during these sessions. Training is taken to learners who are unable to attend the regular off-the-job sessions. Employers have commented that they have noticed an improvement in learners' skills. Most staff have sufficiently detailed lesson plans and clear aims and objectives. Learning sessions are satisfactory or better. However, materials used during learning sessions are unimaginative and tutors rely heavily on poorly photocopied handouts. There is a reliance on the use of background knowledge questions for each unit in both early years care and education and care training programmes. Most of these questions are not appropriate to the learners' level and some sheets have as many as 34 questions for one unit. Level 2 and 3 NVQ learners feel overwhelmed with this task and these questions can often take considerable time to complete. In a few learning sessions learners are not sufficiently motivated to develop their skills.

91. Training is delivered from the Leigh and Bury offices and training rooms are pleasant and of a good size. All staff are appropriately qualified and experienced. There is a range of resources including books, videos, craft materials, demonstration equipment and professional magazines. However, resources are not always easy for learners to use or access. There is a reliance on photocopied materials to accompany each unit delivered, which are difficult for learners to use because of poor quality photocopying. Learners are not helped to access resources, for instance by being given reading lists or relevant internet sites for their assignments and individual research.

## **Leadership and management**

92. A range of effective management actions have been introduced. There has been greatly improved retention and achievement rates. Seven new staff have been appointed and received an induction to the company since the previous inspection. Staff state the appraisal process is positive and supportive. There are good partnerships with relevant organisations such as Sure Start. AL's system for observing staff performance is good. Equality of opportunity is a standing agenda item at the monthly staff meetings. There is an effective appraisal system which links the personal development needs of staff to the strategic aims of the company. Any problems arising in the team are dealt with promptly and sensitively. Although there are some male care workers, there is insufficient activity to encourage more men into the sector. ETP has been introduced satisfactorily. However, there is a heavy reliance on written questioning to test background knowledge. Three ETP learners who speak English as an additional language have been inappropriately referred to the programme. All three of these learners are currently employed in roles suited to learners working towards an NVQ at level 3 and already possess recognised nursing qualifications in their own countries. Some learners are not aware of progression routes. Short courses are not offered and are often left to the learner and employer to arrange.