

INSPECTION REPORT

ABRO Donnington

29 July 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 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

ABRO Donnington

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Army Base Repair Organisation Donnington (ABRO Donnington) is part of Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), an engineering service, repair and remanufacturing organisation. ABRO repairs, maintains and overhauls equipment for the British Army, other governmental organisations, emergency services and local authorities.

Approximately 1,000 staff work at ABRO's site at Donnington, which has areas for mechanical and electronic production. A training centre at the site employs eight staff, including a training manager, who has overall responsibility for the training. Seven of the staff are directly involved in training. The organisation recruits between 18 and 35 learners each year. There are currently 55 learners, 53 of whom are advanced modern apprentices in mechanical, electrical or electronic engineering and two are foundation modern apprentices in mechanical engineering. Training takes place at ABRO's site and at one subcontracted local college. Training is funded by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and through Shropshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

2. ABRO Donnington recruits its learners from the local area. In Shropshire, more than a quarter of jobs are in manufacturing. In June 2004, the rate of unemployment in Shropshire was 1.1 per cent, compared with 1.7 per cent in Telford and Wreken, 2.7 per cent in the West Midlands and 2.2 per cent nationally. The 2001 census identified that Shropshire's minority ethnic groups represented 1.2 per cent of the population, compared with 5.2 per cent in Telford and Wrekin, 11.3 per cent in the West Midlands and 9.1 per cent nationally. In 2000, 73 per cent of 16 year olds and 61 per cent of 17 year olds in Shropshire participated in full-time education, compared with 69 per cent of 16 year olds and 56 per cent of 17 year olds in the West Midlands and 71 per cent of 16 year olds and 58 per cent of 17 year olds nationally.

3. ABRO is accredited with the Investor in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

4. There are 55 learners on the three-year apprenticeship programme. Of these 33 are in mechanical engineering and 22 are in electrical or electronic engineering. Fifty-three of the learners are advanced modern apprentices and the remaining two are foundation modern apprentices. Training is carried out to national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3. All learners take an initial assessment test that measures their ability in literacy and numeracy and also includes aptitude tests in mechanical practice, electrical practice and manual dexterity. Successful candidates are registered on the MoD indentured apprenticeship scheme. All learners have a two-week induction which covers rules and regulations as well as information on the programme and the NVQ. Training in basic mechanical and electrical skills for first-year learners is carried out in ABRO's training

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centre. Learners progress towards a skills-based training qualification in the first year that is comparable with an NVQ at level 2. The remaining two years of training take place in ABRO's production workshops where learners spend eight weeks in each of the various engineering sections. At the end of each eight-week training programme learners' progress is reviewed and job descriptions are assessed. Learners complete a specific project or task at the end of each section and then attend a placement for the last six months of their training. It is normal for learners to enter full-time employment in that particular section once their training is finished. During the three-year period, learners attend a local college for training in an appropriate technical certificate. This is carried out on a day-release basis for the technical certificate with additional half-day training at the college in the first year for the core units of key skills. College staff also visit ABRO's site for half-a-day a fortnight to train learners in the wider key skills.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learner interviews	40
Number of staff interviews	22
Number of employer interviews	6
Number of subcontractor interviews	5
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, leadership and management are good and arrangements for quality assurance and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. Work-based learning in engineering is good.

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	3
Quality assurance	3

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Mechanical engineering</i> - Work-based learning for young people	33	2
<i>Electrical engineering</i> - Work-based learning for young people	22	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

6. **Learners develop good skills during their three-year apprenticeship.** They spend a year in the training centre developing a wide range of competences in basic engineering techniques. During the second and third year, work-based learning is well planned as a series of eight-week placements in different departments in the company. In the final year the placement is extended to provide the opportunity to gain relevant and wider skills in the department.

Quality of education and training

7. **The excellent range of resources includes a well-equipped training centre for mechanical and electrical apprentices.** Classroom facilities include air conditioning, modern data projection equipment and a large screen television. The factory workshop facilities are excellent with a range of machines to industry standard. Learners are trained by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, many of whom are ex-apprentices of the company.

8. **Training is well planned.** All learners receive a thoroughly detailed plan of their future training activities in which expected outcomes and training activities are clearly stated. For learners who make good progress, projects and activities are planned to provide them with interesting and challenging goals. Good attention to health and safety in the training centre and workshops and associated training activities ensure that learners have a good knowledge of safe working practices.

9. **There is insufficient assessment of learners by observation** at level 3 for mechanical and electrical apprentices. A heavy reliance is placed on witness testimony from apprentice masters who are not accredited assessors.

Leadership and management

10. **ABRO has developed an apprenticeship training programme which is closely tailored**

to the company's business needs. The programme is structured over a three-year period. The first year is entirely off the job in ABRO's own training centre to ensure that the learners develop a wide range of basic engineering skills, good technical understanding and a thorough understanding of health and safety. The second and third years are spent rotating around each specialist engineering area covering all aspects of mechanical, electrical, electronic engineering related to the defence industry. During this period learners are supported on the job by a large team of apprentice masters who are skilled engineers and provide coaching and mentoring support for the learners and link with training centre assessors.

11. There is a particularly effective staff appraisal process which sets targets for learner progress and achievement, and also promotes staff training and continuing professional development. Each employee at ABRO has an annual appraisal which is carried out by their line manager and reviewed by a counter signing officer. Targets are set for improving retention and achievement rates, for the development of the MoD standards-based training programme to meet the needs of the business, and to improve the quality of the training. Progress against targets is reviewed every six months. The appraisal process is effective and promotes staff training and continuing professional development. Priorities for training are agreed at appraisal in line with business needs and the personal development needs of the individual.

12. There is good communication between training centre staff, learners, employers and the college which has enabled learners to make good progress towards their qualifications. Communications are open, frequent and meaningful with the learners' progress and well-being central in the process. There is informal daily contact with the learners on site through training centre staff, apprentice masters and production supervisors. Learners' concerns are normally dealt with immediately. The centre manager holds a weekly team briefing which ensures staff are kept informed of all important company information. There are frequent formal meetings between training centre staff, which focus on training, progress and planning. Minutes are recorded and actions are identified for individuals. Communication with the college is good. ABRO's training staff attend course team meetings with staff who are delivering their technical certificates and key skills. Learners' progress and achievement is a key issue and telephone and e-mail contact is frequent. The college is an engineering manufacturing centre of vocational excellence and is committed to providing an excellent service to ABRO's learners.

13. ABRO is very responsive to the needs of its learners and employers and in doing so has been particularly effective in bringing about continuous improvement. Communications are effective and lead to improvement. ABRO listens to comments and suggestions and where possible implements changes to improve the learners' experience. The centre has also developed tailor-made courses in response to employers' requests. For example, the electronics production manager requested that learners be trained on anti-static handling procedures. This has now been incorporated into the apprenticeship.

14. The MoD carries out good quality assurance audits on ABRO Donnington to ensure

the quality of civilian apprenticeships under the standards-based training programme. However, the audits are only carried out every two years and do not identify issues in the interim period. The audits do not look at the learners' full programmes.

15. Quality assurance procedures are insufficiently developed. There is no detailed service level agreement with subcontractors and the contract does not contain sufficient detail to monitor the provision effectively. There is no schedule of monitoring meetings, although ABRO's staff attend course team meetings at the college and good communications are maintained. Too much of this is informal. ABRO does not monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning sufficiently.

16. ABRO has introduced good initiatives to widen participation and attract applications from under-represented groups. Training staff frequently attend school careers evenings to provide good advice and guidance on employment and training opportunities. Current apprentices are used as role models on these occasions and they offer peer advice to prospective applicants. ABRO also encourages visits from local schools to their training rooms to raise awareness of training opportunities and provide an insight into the learners' work. ABRO has started to target under-represented groups with tailored advertisements and marketing materials to improve the participation rates of learners from minority ethnic groups and the numbers of women. Non-stereotypical images and positive messages are used. ABRO positively discriminates in favour of people with restricted mobility. There is a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled people and a central fund is available for equipment, training and services to help disabled staff and learners.

17. Initial training for learners and staff in equality of opportunity is satisfactory, but it is not sufficiently reinforced. All learners are scheduled to receive training in equality of opportunity during their first year of training and it is also included in the induction. Tutor notes for induction are clear and contain appropriate references to current legislation. However, the current group of first-year learners have not yet received training in equal opportunities, and will not now receive such training until they enter the second year of their apprenticeship. There is insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity during the apprenticeship. Equality is not discussed at reviews. All MoD staff are required to take refresher courses in equality of opportunity every three years. However, in all cases this period has lapsed and the refresher courses are now overdue.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good management of training to support business needs
- particularly effective staff appraisal and staff development process
- good communication between training centre staff, learners, employers and the college
- particularly effective actions to promote continuous improvement
- good initiatives to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed formal quality assurance procedures
- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Mechanical engineering

Strengths

- good development of skills
- good achievement of additional qualifications
- excellent resources
- good progression
- well-planned training

Weaknesses

- insufficient assessment by direct observation at NVQ level 3
- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews

Electrical engineering

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates in electrical engineering framework
- good development of skills
- good achievement of additional qualifications
- excellent resources
- good progression
- well-planned training

Weaknesses

- insufficient assessment by direct observation at NVQ level 3
- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ABRO DONNINGTON:

- good first-year training
- opportunity to learn a lot in three years
- lots of opportunities to gain experience and learn different skills
- approachable instructors who give good answers to questions
- always know what needs to be done
- work at own pace
- variation of work and good range of activities in the workshops means never on the same job too long
- being independent in the workshop
- good people to work with in the workshops
- good support from training centre staff and apprentice masters
- good holidays and money

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ABRO DONNINGTON COULD IMPROVE:

- more interesting exercises in the training centre
- the amount of paperwork for NVQ - there should be less
- would like the opportunity to remain on workshop sections for longer period
- more notice of next training location
- electrical NVQ at level 3 should be introduced earlier
- better hand tools at college
- more visits to ABRO Bovington and car manufacturers

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ABRO DONNINGTON:

- ensure that assessment includes all sources of evidence
- improve target-setting in progress reviews
- provide training opportunities for apprentice masters
- monitor effectiveness of teaching and learning
- ensure that learner's understanding of equality and diversity is reinforced throughout the apprenticeship
- improve quality assurance system to identify and act on improvement needs

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good management of training to support business needs
- particularly effective staff appraisal and staff development process
- good communication between training centre staff, learners, employers and the college
- particularly effective actions to promote continuous improvement
- good initiatives to widen participation

Weaknesses

- insufficiently developed formal quality assurance procedures
- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity

18. ABRO Donnington has developed an apprenticeship training programme which is closely tailored to the company's business needs. In keeping with many engineering and manufacturing employers ABRO has struggled to recruit and retain skilled personnel. Flexibility, being receptive to change and challenging existing working practices have all been priorities since the company was established as a training fund in 2002. The apprenticeship training programme is structured over a three-year period, the first year being entirely off the job in ABRO's own training centre. This ensures that learners develop a wide range of basic engineering skills, good technical understanding and a thorough understanding of health and safety. The second and third years are spent rotating around each specialist engineering area, to cover all aspects of mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering related to the defence industry. Learners develop a wide range of engineering skills and experience across the site. During this period they attend college to work towards their technical certificates and are supported on the job by a large team of apprentice masters. These are all skilled engineers who provide coaching and mentoring support for the learners and link with training centre assessors. Towards the end of the third year, learners choose the engineering discipline they wish to be based in, and during the last three months learners have a significant independent workload. Almost all learners who complete modern apprenticeships with ABRO achieve full-time employment. There is a high level of support for the apprenticeship programme from senior managers and production managers at the company. A large proportion of ABRO's workforce including managers were trained in the centre, and there is good progression from modern apprenticeships into higher education.

19. There is a particularly effective staff appraisal process, which sets targets for learners' progress and achievement, and also promotes staff training and continuing professional development. Each employee at ABRO participates in an annual staff appraisal carried out by their line manager and reviewed by a counter signing officer. The training centre

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manager works to a series of targets which have to be met. Most of these are appropriately focused on improving retention and achievement rates, developing the MoD standards-based training programme to meet the needs of the business and improvement in the quality of the training. These targets are also discussed and passed down to the training centre supervisors. Performance against targets are reviewed every six months. The appraisal process is effective in promoting staff training and continuing professional development. Each employee has a training record which identifies all training activities. Priorities for training are agreed at appraisal, in line with business needs and the personal development needs of the individual. Most training staff are currently attending training. Newly appointed staff are taking assessor awards and teacher training qualifications, and other staff are following information technology, computer aided design and engineering qualifications. As many aspects of engineering are rapidly changing technologies, staff are being retrained in order to keep up to date.

20. There is good communication between training centre staff, learners, employers and the college. This has enabled learners to make good progress towards their qualifications. Communications are open, frequent and meaningful, with the learners' progress and well-being central in the process. One of ABRO's core values is about valuing people and they do this by improving communications. There is informal daily contact with the learners on site through training centre staff, apprentice masters and production supervisors. As the training centre is on site, learners frequently call in to discuss their progress and training with the instructors. The centre operates an open door policy and learners' concerns are normally dealt with immediately. The centre manager holds a weekly team briefing which ensures staff are kept informed of all important company information. There are frequent formal meetings between training centre staff which focuses on training, progress and planning. Minutes are kept of meetings and actions are clearly identified for individuals.

21. First, second and third phase learners have quality circles which are run by the learners and training centre staff also attend. Representation on the quality circle is by election of the learner group, and issues of concern are raised and actions are taken. Representatives feedback to the group. Learners have increased their confidence, accept their responsibilities more willingly and are better able to communicate. Communication with the college is good. Training staff attend course team meetings with staff who are delivering technical certificates and key skills. Progress and achievement is a key discussion topic. Telephone and e-mail contact is frequent. The college is an engineering manufacturing centre of vocational excellence and is committed to providing an excellent service to learners.

22. Strategic and operational planning is satisfactory. Nationally ABRO's strategic objectives are about competitiveness, leading-edge competence in key areas and outstanding performance. These are interpreted and represented in the three-year development plan and annual development plan. The plans clearly demonstrate a commitment to training and development and provide local employment opportunities. ABRO recognises the problems they face now and in the future in terms of recruiting suitable 16-18 year olds into engineering apprenticeships. In response, they have developed a new marketing strategy and have committed to widening participation by

working with schools on work experience and on 14-16 engineering curriculum projects. It is too early to judge the success of these initiatives.

23. Provision and use of performance data is satisfactory. Learner information is held centrally, including all personal information, learners' programme and initial assessment information. Detailed records are kept on the learners' progress by training centre staff. This includes units achieved, those in progress and those still to be taken. As learners achieve units, these are then recorded on the management information system. All staff have access to learner data and this is used effectively by the centre manager and trainers to monitor performance of the centre and of individual learners.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

24. ABRO has introduced good initiatives to widen participation and attract applications from under-represented groups. Training staff frequently attend school careers evenings to provide good advice and guidance on employment and training opportunities. Current learners are used as role models on these occasions and they offer peer advice to prospective applicants. ABRO also encourages visits from local schools to their training rooms to raise awareness of training opportunities and to provide an insight into the learners' work. ABRO has started to tailor advertisements and marketing publicity to improve the participation rates of learners from minority ethnic groups and the number of women. There is improved use of non-stereotypical images and positive messages to encourage applications from under-represented groups. Advertisements for training and employment opportunities are targeted at specialist publications as well as magazines and periodicals which are popular among the minority ethnic population of the local community. ABRO positively discriminates in favour of people with restricted mobility. There is a guaranteed interview scheme for disabled people and a central fund is available for equipment, training and services to help disabled staff and learners. There is also an minority ethnic steering committee and a disability steering committee.

25. Staff and learners have appropriate access to information on equality of opportunity. A general statement is issued to all staff and learners, and the detailed policies are available if required. Each MoD site has an equal opportunities officer and a hotline exists for learners or staff to make contact on harassment issues. The commitment of the MoD to equality of opportunity is communicated effectively through a comprehensive range of policies and procedures encompassed in the MoD personnel manual. The manual is available on the MoD website, and controlled copies are held by managers for easy reference. The manual contains detailed policies and procedures covering equality of opportunity, and bullying and harassment, and identifies the responsible persons for implementation of the policies, as well as containing useful supporting information such as equal opportunities terms of reference, checklists and action plans. The manual also contains useful references for further reading which signpost relevant reference sources for racial equality, gender and disability as well as industrial tribunal cases. However, the manual does not reference all of the current legislation. For example, although it references the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, it does not reference the amendments to these acts, nor the recent European directives. The policies and procedures do not sufficiently reinforce relevant legislation and are not

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available in alternative formats. The manual has not been updated since 2001.

26. ABRO Donnington has a suitable complaints procedure to incorporate equality of opportunity grievances. Complaints are collated centrally and are swiftly and appropriately dealt with. However, there is no analysis of complaints to identify trends. Equality of opportunity is not an agenda item at the apprentice board and, although it is an agenda item at the quality circles, the issue is not adequately discussed at meetings. ABRO Donnington adequately monitors its subcontractor's arrangements for equality of opportunity. A copy of the subcontractor's policy is retained at ABRO Donnington. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity but staff do not sufficiently reinforce and record the learners' understanding as part of the review process. Access to the company's training rooms and workshops for people with restricted mobility is good, as is access at the subcontractors' site. Workshops have wide walkways and are kept well maintained and clear of obstructions.

27. Initial training for learners and staff in equality of opportunity is satisfactory, but it is not sufficiently reinforced. The MoD is committed to training staff in equality of opportunity and training is available in a range of ways including interactive learning opportunities modules, and one- or two-day training courses or workshops. All staff are required to attend training in equality of opportunity. There is good information for learners, staff and employers on equality and employment rights. This information is clear and is now being used successfully as an independent learning pack and source of reference for learners. Learners are provided with a distance learning pack to improve their awareness before receiving formal training in equality of opportunity. All learners are scheduled to receive training in equality of opportunity during their first year of training and it is included in the induction. Tutor notes for induction are clear and contain appropriate references to current legislation. However, the current group of first-year learners have not yet received training in equality of opportunity, and will not now receive such training until they enter the second year of their apprenticeship. There is insufficient reinforcement of equality and diversity during the apprenticeship and during progress reviews. All MoD staff are required to take refresher courses in equality of opportunity every three years. However, in all cases this period has lapsed and the refresher courses are now overdue.

28. The MoD is committed to collecting and analysing equal opportunities data. Its commitment to data analysis is included in its equal opportunities policies and procedures. Equality of opportunity data is collated and analysed centrally by the MoD. Reports are produced based on numbers and proportions of successes or failures at each stage of the recruitment process broken down by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. Exit interviews are also carried out and there is an analysis of exits by age, gender, disability and ethnicity. There is also an analysis of age and seniority of staff who are successful at promotion boards. However, ABRO does not systematically analyse the retention, progression and achievement rates of under-represented groups on a formal basis. There is no trend analysis, although current year figures are considered. Subsequently, there are no specific equality and diversity targets for gender and disability. ABRO does not use and analyse a range of equality indicators, such as those for learners with additional support needs.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

29. ABRO's training centre is very responsive to the needs of its learners and employers, and in doing so has been particularly effective in bringing about improvement once the need has been identified. The staff have day-to-day contact with learners in the centre and in the various workshops. There is also regular contact through the apprentice board with employers and through quality circles with learners. ABRO listens to comments and suggestions, and where possible, implements changes to improve the learners' experience and to provide a better service to employers. For example, employers reported that the excessive amount of time spent on assessment would be better spent developing additional basic engineering skills. The centre responded by negotiating with the Sector Skills Council and securing their approval to use MoD standards-based training as an alternative to the performing engineering operations at level 2. This has enabled the centre to spend more time on learning and skills development which closely meets the needs of the business. The centre has also developed tailor-made courses in response to employer requests. For example, the electronics production manager requested that learners be trained on anti-static handling procedures. This has now been incorporated into the apprenticeship programme.

30. Communications are effective and lead to improvement. The effective communications with learners while in college has enabled ABRO trainers to identify additional support needs early. Several learners who had gone through initial assessment with no needs identified have subsequently experienced difficulties with key skills and the level of mathematics on engineering courses. These have quickly been recognised and suitable arrangements have been made for additional support and extra mathematics support. Many of these learners have now achieved their key skills qualification. ABRO is committed to developing its people. Higher level skills is a need of the business and a high proportion of learners progress to higher education courses after completing their apprenticeship. Learners' success is well celebrated with learners frequently taking part in national and international competitions. When learners complete their apprenticeships they receive their deeds of apprenticeship at a formal awards evening.

31. The MoD carries out good quality assurance audits on ABRO Donnington to ensure the quality of civilian apprenticeships under the standards-based training programme. This is carried out by a separate directorate of human resources based in Glasgow. The audits are carried out against standards which have been specified and which meets the needs of MoD and the business needs of companies carrying out engineering service, repair and remanufacturing contracts for the military. Recent audit results have been good with very few recommendations. There is an over-reliance on these audits to identify improvement needs. However, the MoD audits are only carried out every two years and do not identify issues in the interim period. The audits do not look at the full programmes being taken by apprentices at ABRO.

32. Feedback from learners and employers is satisfactory. Learner surveys are carried out twice a year, on phase one and phase three apprentices. Learners rate the support they receive from centre staff, the skills and technical instruction from apprentice masters,

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the technical content of the courses they attend and the teaching and learning they receive. However, the centre does not sufficiently analyse the feedback data that learners provide. Neither does it produce a detailed action plan to deal with issues raised. It does not celebrate the positive messages they are being given, and does not monitor improvements or trends over time.

33. Internal verification is satisfactory. The training supervisor carries out all internal verification, and another trainer is currently being trained as an internal verifier. There has been a recent standardisation meeting where assessors share good practice with each other. There is insufficient direct observation of assessors carrying out assessment. The internal verification sample and recording is satisfactory.

34. Quality assurance procedures are insufficiently developed. Although ABRO has a formal contract with the local college, the current contract has no detailed service level agreement and does not contain sufficient detail to monitor the provision effectively. For example, there is no schedule to monitor meetings. Although ABRO's staff attend course team meetings at the college and good communications are maintained, much of this is informal. In addition, although the college has its own observation process, the contract has no provision for ABRO to observe the effectiveness of teaching and learning or for receiving details of the college's own observation results and actions for improvement. ABRO does not set the college targets for achievement and the college is unaware of ABRO's own targets for full framework completion. There are no targets for performance and no identified arbitration routes if the need should arise. ABRO does not identify acceptable performance and the sanctions available if performance is unsatisfactory. The college does not provide ABRO with a copy of the external verifier reports and ABRO is unaware of any awarding body issues which might affect the learners. ABRO has very recently introduced a new system for formally observing the training sessions at the training centre, but this does not lead to quality improvement. Observations are carried out by a supervisor on all trainers but, to date, only one observation has been carried out on each trainer and of all those carried out so far the commentary is insufficiently evaluative. Staff who have been observed have not received sufficient written feedback and there has been no agreed actions to secure improvement. The quality assurance system does not lead to continuous improvement of teaching and learning. There is an over-reliance on improvement needs being identified informally by other parties, such as employers or learners.

35. ABRO's staff were suitably involved in the formulation of the self-assessment report, including checking and commenting on its accuracy. However, learners, employers and the college staff were not directly involved. The self-assessment report does not adequately identify all of the strengths and weaknesses of ABRO's provision. Inspectors identified that some of the strengths were overstated. Although there is no action plan, the annual development plan does cover self-assessment strengths and weaknesses, but this is not cross-referenced to the self-assessment report. The development plan does not set sufficient dates or provide costings for the specified actions.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Mechanical engineering</i> - Work-based learning for young people	33	2
<i>Electrical engineering</i> - Work-based learning for young people	22	2

Mechanical engineering

Strengths

- good development of skills
- good achievement of additional qualifications
- excellent resources
- good progression
- well-planned training

Weaknesses

- insufficient assessment by direct observation at NVQ level 3
- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews

Electrical engineering

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates in electrical engineering framework
- good development of skills
- good achievement of additional qualifications
- excellent resources
- good progression
- well-planned training

Weaknesses

- insufficient assessment by direct observation at NVQ level 3
- insufficient target-setting at progress reviews

Achievement and standards

36. Retention and achievement rates on the electrical engineering apprenticeship

programme are good. The average retention rate for 1998-2000 is 79 per cent and the achievement rate is 75 per cent. However, in 2001-02 only four of the previous 10 starters are still in learning.

37. Mechanical and electrical apprentices develop good skills during their three-year apprenticeship. They are given a clear and detailed learning plan that shows the structure of training and the skills they will achieve and when. After the initial induction period learners spend a year in the training centre developing a wide range of competences in basic engineering techniques. During the second and third year, work-based learning is well planned as a series of eight-week placements in different departments in the company. In the final year an extended placement provides the opportunity to gain relevant and wider skills before starting their employment. Learners are closely supervised in the early stages of their training, but are gradually given more responsibility so that by the third year they are working independently most of the time. First-year learners produce a good standard of components and assemblies. Those who make good progress are encouraged to gain further skills through a range of small scale projects and activities. Their finished work is well presented and is displayed prominently in the training centre for visitors to see. For example, engines expertly sectioned by learners to reveal their internal mechanisms are painted and mounted in display cabinets. Large scale projects allow learners to demonstrate, test and further develop their skills and include the assembly of a glider winch and the rebuilding of a damaged armoured personnel carrier, which is displayed outside the training centre. During their second and third years, learners develop a high level of skills in the workshops. They work under the close supervision and guidance of apprentice masters, highly skilled and experienced craftsman, who demonstrate, guide and support the learner in extending and improving their competences through a range of complex engineering activities. Learners are regularly entered for national and international skills competitions in which they proudly demonstrate their skills. Learners' achievements are celebrated through an awards ceremony and prizes are presented by television and sporting celebrities.

38. Achievement of additional qualifications is good by all learners. Short courses increase their awareness of a wide range of engineering activities. Manual handling, risk assessment, fire awareness training, COSHH and health and safety courses are completed by all learners. Nine learners in the last two years have completed an introduction to management course, designed to prepare them for supervisory roles.

39. Retention and achievement rates in the mechanical engineering apprenticeship programme are satisfactory. The average retention rate throughout 1998-2000 is 67 per cent and the achievement rate is 59 per cent.

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)																
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	20		20		22		18		33		16					
Retained*	0		0		0		15	83	21	64	12	75				
Successfully completed	0		0		0		11	61	21	64	12	75				
Still in learning	19		19		15		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																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2003-04		2002-03													
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		4													
Retained*	0		4	100												
Successfully completed	0		4	100												
Still in learning	2		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

40. The excellent range of resources includes a well-equipped training centre for mechanical and electrical apprentices. There is good investment in new machinery and adaptations are planned to older machines to ensure that they meet stringent health and safety standards. Electrical equipment which is used in the training centre is the same as that used in the production workshops, enabling skills acquired by learners in the training centre to be easily transferable to manufacturing activities. The classroom facilities include air conditioning, modern data projection equipment and a large screen television. The production workshop facilities are excellent with a range of industry-standard machines. A strong emphasis is placed on good health and safety procedures, and all learners wear appropriate safety and protective clothing and footwear. Good housekeeping in the training centre and throughout the factory workshops ensure that potential accidents are minimised. Learners are provided with extensive toolkits in each of the departments. They are trained by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, many of whom are ex-apprentices of the company.

41. Good progression routes are available within the company. All foundation modern apprentices receive the same training as advanced modern apprentices. For foundation modern apprentices who show a potential for more highly skilled work there is the

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opportunity to move onto an advanced modern apprenticeship. Most of the learners demonstrate good academic progression. Sixty-nine mechanical and electrical learners have progressed onto national and higher national certificates in the past three years. Over 500 employees out of a total workforce of 1,300 are ex-apprentices, many of whom are supervisors, apprentice masters and senior managers. Education opportunities are provided to learners who have completed their apprenticeship framework. In the past three years, 21 learners have progressed on to a higher national award.

42. Learners receive satisfactory support with literacy and numeracy. They also receive additional support in key skills when college tutors attend the ABRO site for half a day every two weeks. Learners appreciate this support and feel that it helps them to achieve their learning goals. There has been no requirement for language support.

43. There is insufficient assessment by observation of mechanical and electrical learners at NVQ level 3. There is a heavy reliance on witness testimony from apprentice masters who are not accredited assessors. Assessment of portfolios and progress reports are heavily used. Managers have well-advanced plans for an additional member of staff to start observations in September.

44. There is insufficient target-setting at reviews. Reviews are carried out by apprentice masters, team leaders and line managers on completion of the eight-week training programme. During the review, documents and discussions concentrate on how the learner has performed during the latest period of training. There is no agreement about the evidence learners need to gather and record. Progress at college and with key skills is not discussed. However, learners know which skills are to be gained during the next eight weeks of their training through the well-prepared skills specification documents.

Leadership and management

45. Training is well planned. All learners receive a thoroughly detailed plan of their future training activities in which expected outcomes and training activities are clearly stated. For learners who make good progress, projects and activities are planned to provide interesting and challenging goals. Good attention to health and safety in the training centre and workshops and associated training activities ensure that learners have a good knowledge of safe working practices. The training programme clearly extends and builds on the learner's development and meets individual needs. For example, a group of learners who needed help to complete their key skills were provided with tutorial support in the workplace from a local college.

46. The skills learners are expected to gain are specified in detail before training starts. Learners who receive training in the optics workshop are given training in the hazards of radiation. Instructors in the training and production workshops are vocationally qualified. However, apprentice masters in production workshops have had little training on what duties are expected of them in relation to training apprentices. A manual has been provided for apprentice masters but very few have a copy. All expressed the view that training would enable them to provide a better approach to monitoring learners' progress.

47. Internal verification is satisfactory. Periodic checks are well referenced to record the assessor's visits. Key skills portfolios are thoroughly assessed and verified. There has been little formal observation of instructors in the training centre workshop. An observational programme took place in May 2004 but the feedback was insufficiently detailed. ABRO does not assure the quality of teaching sessions in the subcontracted college, nor do they routinely receive external verifier reports from the college.