

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Acacia Training Limited**

**17 March 2006**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## **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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

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.

## **Pre-inspection analysis**

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

## Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

## Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

# INSPECTION REPORT

## Acacia Training Limited

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Acacia Training Limited (ATL) is a private provider originally established during 2001, by two nurses, to provide training for care settings. The main office is based in Biddulph, Staffordshire, with two satellite centres in Manchester and Crewe. In 2003, ATL was contracted by Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to deliver employer training programmes (ETP) in care, early years and playwork in Manchester and surrounding areas. Contracts with Leicestershire, Wiltshire and Swindon LSC's have extended the ETP provision to include Leicester, Derby and Wiltshire. ATL is subcontracted by Scientiam Limited (Scientiam), to deliver training and assessment to 99 care and early years learners on apprenticeship programmes in Staffordshire, Cheshire, Manchester and The Wirral. Ninety-seven learners, many of whom are supported by SureStart and Skills for Care funding, are completing a privately funded national vocational qualification (NVQ) and related care, early years and play work programmes.

2. The senior management team comprises a managing director and four directors. Three of the directors take responsibility for estates, finance and projects, and the fourth is the director of operations who is responsible for the quality of provision. A recent appointment has extended the management team to include an assistant director of operations. There are three training co-ordinators, each of whom has responsibility for a geographical area of training. The co-ordinators manage teams of full-time, part time, freelance and work-based assessors.

3. All ATL's learners are employed and work in care, early years and playwork settings. Most of the ETP learners become aware of the programmes through their employers. Learners can join a programme at any time of the year. Training is delivered at the employers' premises through either small group or individual coaching and support. Space is hired on site from the employer if training of larger groups is planned. Learners on all programmes see their assessors every two to six weeks for training or assessment. For learners on the ETP, this contact also includes progress reviews and target-setting. The monitoring and review of learners' progress on apprenticeship programmes is carried out by staff who are employed by Scientiam.

4. At the time of the inspection, ATL had 49 care learners and 50 early years learners on apprenticeship programmes. Two hundred and sixty-three learners are on ETP, of whom 225 are following care programmes and 38 are following early years programmes.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 3**

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** ATL's leadership and management and the arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory. The arrangements for quality improvement are inadequate. Social care ETP and apprenticeships for young people are satisfactory. Early years ETP is satisfactory, but apprenticeship training is inadequate.

**6. The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** ATL produced its first self-assessment report in 2005. The process of identifying strengths and weaknesses involved staff, and took into account feedback from learners, employers and other stakeholders. However, some of the staff are not fully aware of the purpose and content of the report. Some of the strengths and weaknesses in the report matched those identified by inspectors. However, some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses.

**7. The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** ATL uses its management information systems effectively to monitor its retention and achievement rates against organisation and staff targets. Staff development supports business growth and strategic planning, with a strong emphasis on improving the support for learners. Quality improvement is not sufficiently established to provide consistent training and assessment across all provision.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR ACACIA TRAINING LIMITED:

- develop an effective strategy for literacy, numeracy and language
- consider effective methods to assess learners' additional support needs
- formalise key processes and strategies to support quality improvements
- review resources to support learning
- develop a pro-active approach to equal opportunities
- develop a system to manage assessment effectively

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate*

Grades awarded at inspection

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

<b>Health, public services and care</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b>Social care</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	49	3	
Employer training pilot	225	3	
<b>Early years</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	50	4	
Employer training pilot	38	3	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. Provision in social care and early years was reported on and graded with contributory grades for apprenticeships and the ETP.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	35
Number of learners interviewed	59
Number of staff interviewed	41
Number of employers interviewed	24
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	26
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	3

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievements and standards

9. **Retention rates and progress are good on early years ETP programmes.** Retention rates were 98 per cent in 2004-05. Twenty-five per cent of learners achieved their qualification and 22 of the remaining 30 learners are on target to finish in April 2006. The ETP programme encourages learners to focus on the job role. Employers report that learners are more motivated to take the initiative during group activities.

10. **Retention rates and progress are good for social care advanced apprentices.** Of the 14 advanced apprentices recruited in 2002-03, 50 per cent were retained and 50 per cent completed the framework. In 2003-04, seven learners were recruited and to date 43 per cent have completed the framework. The remaining 29 per cent are making satisfactory progress.

11. **Retention and achievement for learners on the ETP is improving.** In 2003-04, of the 605 starters, 66 per cent achieved the NVQ. Forty-nine per cent of the 306 learners who joined the programme in 2004-05 have achieved the NVQ. Thirty per cent of the learners who are still on programme are on target to achieve in March 2006. Of the 149 learners recruited in 2005-06, 8 per cent have achieved the qualification and 133 are still in learning.

12. Most of the learners produce a satisfactory standard of work in their portfolios. Portfolios are well structured and well referenced. Many learners have achieved related early years qualifications such as outdoor play and healthy eating during their training.

13. Achievement on social care apprenticeship programmes is satisfactory. However, progress for some learners has been slow. One learner has been in training since 2002-03 and another since 2003-04. Of the 17 learners who started in 2004-05, five are making slow progress towards the NVQ. One of the 17 learners who started in 2004-05 has started working towards key skills units.

**14. Achievement rates are poor on the early years advanced and apprenticeship programme.** In 2003-04, 38 learners started apprenticeships, seven of whom have completed the framework and four are still in learning. Of the 70 learners who started in 2004-05, five have completed the framework and 34 are still in learning.

### **The quality of provision**

**15. Individual coaching is good in ETP early years programmes.** Assessors help learners to expand their knowledge and understanding of caring for individuals and the NVQ requirements. Learners report that it has enabled them to make good progress and complete further research. Assessors use very effective questioning techniques on social care programmes.

**16. Support for learners is particularly effective on early years programmes.** Frequent visits to the workplace enable employers' and learners' needs to be met. Flexibility when planning assessment observations, together with good short term target-setting, are valued by learners. Learners who need additional support receive extra visits. Learners are confident that they will receive a quick response when they contact assessors by e-mail, text or mobile telephone.

**17. Working relationships and communications are good between the providers' staff and employers.** The employers of learners on ETP and social care apprenticeship programmes use assessment action plans well to plan observations. Some employers are well informed about their learners' progress, but some would like more detail.

18. Employer engagement is satisfactory. Many of the employers offer work-based learning to support the background knowledge of the NVQ. Most employers provide learners with reference books, journals and an occupational circulars which are used in written assignments and personal statements.

19. Assessment is satisfactory on ETP and social care apprenticeship programmes. Assessment is well planned and an appropriate range of assessment methods are used. Most of the observation records are detailed and well referenced. Oral questioning is used effectively to complete units.

**20. Assessment planning is inconsistent on early years apprenticeship programmes.** Some employers are not fully involved in the process. Plans are not always checked by assessors and they do not always include considerations for health and safety, the ratio of children to adults or the effect of not including the employer on individual children.

**21. Practical observations on social care ETP programmes take place towards the end of the programme.** ETP learners who have been training for seven months of the 12-month programme have had little or no observation of their practical competences. Some learners have completed all the assignments and written work for their NVQ, but have not been observed.

**22. The induction for ETP learners is ineffective** and does not include enough information on health and safety, equality of opportunity, policies and procedures. Learners have little recollection of the induction process. The induction for apprentices includes information



on the apprenticeship framework, but not on the resources available to meet current practice.

23. **Initial assessment on the ETP programmes is poor.** Literacy and numeracy skills are not tested and some additional learning needs are only apparent later in the programme. Initial assessment results for apprentices are not used effectively in individual learning plans.

24. **On the early years advanced apprenticeship programmes, some assessors do not effectively extend and develop learners' knowledge.** Oral questions are not challenging. Written work is set at too low a level for learners at level 3.

### **Leadership and management**

25. **Staff training and development is good.** It is linked very clearly to the three-year development plan and to the annual staff appraisal. Staff value the training and share examples of good practice.

26. **ATL's customised management information system is used particularly well.** The organisation captures a wide range of information on learners and staff and effectively analyses this to plan for improvements. Meaningful information is provided for staff and it is used well for action-planning and decision-making.

27. **ATL is very clear about its strategic direction.** The organisation is aware of the needs of the local community and how best to respond to them. The structure of the organisation is clear, staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities, and are appropriately qualified.

28. Communications are satisfactory. There are regular management meetings to discuss developments and overall performance on how staff are meeting retention and achievement targets. Productive links with local organisations and networks ensure that ATL is well informed about developments within the health and social care sector. Some links with employers are effective. However, some employers have little understanding of the requirements of the qualification or of their learners' progress.

29. The collection, analysis and use of feedback from learners, staff and employers is satisfactory. Feedback is collated and actions are taken to improve provision. Many of the actions are completed quickly.

30. The arrangements for internal verification are clearly specified in a set of procedures. Although a systematic approach to sample assessment and assessor activity is in place, some assessment planning and practices are inconsistent and some record-keeping is incomplete.

31. Policies and procedures to support equality of opportunity are adequate and accessible to all staff. Clear guidelines include details on how staff can manage their work time. ATL is very responsive to staff suggestions and concerns about providing to provide better working conditions.

32. **The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are poor.** There is no strategy, policy or procedure in place to help the organisation identify, provide and

evaluate this support for learners. Some support is provided, but it is given informally by unqualified staff.

**33. Learners who are making slow progress are well supported.** Alternative assessment methods are available for learners with additional literacy needs. Fifty per cent of learners who were identified as at risk of leaving early, successfully completed their training. However, there is no managed approach for allocating resources and additional support at the beginning of the programme.

34. Detailed reports are available to identify ATL's learner diversity profile targets in compliance with LSC requirements. However, there are no targets for retention and achievement for different learner groups or actions to support improvement. Insufficient attention is paid to recording the arrangements for equal opportunities at employers' premises. There is a reliance on other agencies checking equality policies as part of the registration requirements.

**35. Equality of opportunity is explained well in the learners' handbook.** However, the subject is insufficiently covered at induction. Reinforcement of equality at reviews is limited to questioning to check that learners are not experiencing harassment in the workplace.

**36. The arrangements to manage subcontracted training are inadequate.** Despite improving communication and monitoring arrangements, the working relationships between Scientiam's training and development advisers and ATL's assessors are not currently contributing to improving the learners' experience.

**37. The approach to improving the quality of provision is inadequate.** Quality improvement activities are not ensuring a good experience for all learners on all programmes. Feedback is not fully analysed and used to make continuous improvements. Observations are not carried out on all key learning processes. Some quality assurance arrangements are not supported by policies, and some new policies and procedures are not sufficiently established.

## Leadership and management

### Strengths

- good development and training for staff
- particularly effective use of management information systems

### Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements to support literacy, numeracy and language needs
- inadequate arrangements to manage subcontracted training
- inadequate approach to improving the quality of provision
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities

## **Health, public services and care**

### ***Social care***

#### *Strengths*

- good retention and progress for advanced apprentices
- satisfactory and improving achievements for ETP learners
- effective questioning and activities to develop knowledge

#### *Weaknesses*

- slow progress for some apprentices
- late assessment of practical skills on ETP
- ineffective induction

### ***Early years***

#### *Strengths*

- good retention and progress for ETP learners
- good individual coaching for ETP learners
- flexible and responsive support for learners

#### *Weaknesses*

- poor achievement rates for apprentices
- inadequate extension and development of knowledge for advanced apprentices
- inconsistent assessment planning for apprenticeship programmes
- ineffective initial assessment
- poor induction on ETP

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ACACIA TRAINING LIMITED:**

- the assessor helps you to stay on target and explains the NVQ standards well
- 'the programme has improved my confidence and how I feel about myself'
- getting this qualification is furthering my career
- 'I listen and relate better to children and parents'
- the assessors are accessible and reliable and make you feel comfortable
- the assessors come here to my work
- you can change the questions to suit your own setting
- the possibilities for progression to higher education

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK ACACIA TRAINING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:**

- the information at the start of the programme
- the background knowledge questions - they should be written in simpler language
- the small group training sessions - there should be more
- the pace - it is too fast when going over questions
- the distance to travel to see assessors
- more reference books
- more observations of what we do instead of all the writing
- the appointment system - review and observation appointments are sometimes missed
- the identification of your assessor earlier in the programme

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 3**

#### Strengths

- good development and training for staff
- particularly effective use of management information systems

#### Weaknesses

- inadequate arrangements to support literacy, numeracy and language needs
- inadequate arrangements to manage subcontracted training
- inadequate approach to improving the quality of provision
- insufficient monitoring of equal opportunities

38. Staff training and development is good. Staff are encouraged to take part in training which will have an effect on learners, and which helps to increase the retention and achievement rates. All new staff have a thorough induction and are given an employee's handbook which contains relevant policies and procedures. Training and development is linked very clearly to the annual appraisal. Staff targets are set and reviewed through the appraisal system and through regular individual supervision meetings. Training needs are prioritised, taking into account the needs of the organisation and the individual. The three-year development plan ensures the professional development of staff in their vocational area. It encourages them to achieve assessment and verification qualifications, but not teaching qualifications. Attendance at training events is recorded. Staff value the training and share examples of good practice.

39. ATL's customised management information system is used particularly well. The relatively new system has been developed in-house and can be adapted quickly to meet information needs. The organisation captures a wide range of information on learners and staff and effectively analyses this to plan improvements. The system provides timely and accurate information about retention and achievement, learners' progress and staff performance. Meaningful information is provided for staff and it is used well to review aspects of performance, such as target-setting, action-planning and decision-making. During the three-monthly assessor and manager supervisory meetings, data is used particularly well to identify and support learners who are making slow progress. The retention rate has improved from 63 per cent in 2003-04 to 75 per cent for 2004-05. In social care and childcare, the retention rates have increased and learners have made more progress towards their qualification aims.

40. ATL is very clear about its strategic direction, and opportunities for development have been well researched. There is a clear focus on growth and the business planning processes are in place to manage it. A range of networking activities ensures that the organisation is knowledgeable about the needs of the local community and how best to respond to them. The structure of the organisation is good, and staff are clear about their

roles and responsibilities. Resources to support training are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced and provide individual coaching and support in the workplace.

41. Communications are satisfactory. Management are approachable, provide good support for staff and are responsive to their needs. There are regular management meetings to discuss developments and overall performance. Other staff meetings take place at the head office in Biddulph and focus on progress, retention and achievement and how staff are meeting their targets. Communication with staff who work remotely has improved. Staff have mobile telephones and access to laptop computers or use their own computers. This investment in information technology has helped the organisation to make better use of e-mail facilities and the intranet. The intranet contains relevant policies and documents such as lesson plans, and provides a forum for discussion. There are productive links with local organisations and networks such as the Sure Start Partnership, Cheshire Care Consortium, and Skills for Care North West. These meetings help to ensure that ATL is well informed about developments in the health and social care sector, and enable staff to exchange ideas and share good practice. Some employers are well informed and are involved in the learning and progress of their learners. For other employers, the communication is less effective and they have little understanding of the requirements of the qualification.

42. The arrangements for literacy, numeracy and language support are poor. There is no strategy, policy or procedure in place to help the organisation identify, provide and evaluate this specialised support. Some support is offered but it is given informally by unqualified staff.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

43. Policies and procedures to support equality of opportunity are adequate and are accessible to all staff. These include grievance, harassment and complaints procedures. Clear guidelines are given on how staff can manage flexible working, the compression of the working week into shift patterns and voluntary reduced working hours. ATL is responsive to staff suggestions and concerns. For example, new arrangements which link work time to distance travelled were agreed after staff raised concerns about travelling long distances in their own time.

44. Five staff have attended external training in equality and diversity, and all staff attended in-house training on equality of opportunity, legal obligations and how equality benefits the learner. To improve the support given to learners, ATL has a planned strategy to ensure staff are qualified to the appropriate key skills level and to offer support for training and portfolio-building. All staff meetings include equality as an agenda item, but very few of the minutes contain details of meaningful discussion or actions.

45. Potential learners are given good advice and guidance about funding for their programmes. Those who request a programme which is not offered by ATL, receive good advice on other providers. Learners have good pastoral support from assessors and value their frequent contact and accessibility. ATL accepts learners from areas where other providers have been reluctant to work because of the remote area or operational complexities. Learners who are making slow progress are identified by assessors at the supervisory meetings and intervention actions are agreed. Fifty per cent of learners who were identified as at risk of leaving early, have successfully completed their training.

Alternative assessment methods are available for learners who have literacy problems. Assessors can request the use of portable dictation machines for those who have literacy needs and for those who prefer this as a method of recording personal statements. In many instances, requests for support come from learners who are making slow progress towards their qualification. There is no managed approach to allocating resources and additional support at the beginning of the programme.

46. Learners' and employers' handbooks contain an equality statement. The learners' handbook has clear explanations of what equality means, it outlines behaviour expected of learners, and what responsibilities ATL and the employer have to them. The ATL website has a comprehensive list of support agencies, with hyperlinks for easy access. However, very few learners have access to the website and learners do not have access to a written copy with telephone contact details.

47. ATL's monitoring and promotion of equality is insufficient. During the learners' induction, equal opportunities is insufficiently covered. Learners' rights to work in a safe environment without fear of harassment or bullying are covered, as are their rights of appeal if they do not agree with an assessment decision. However, little consideration is given to developing strategies to deal with situations learners may encounter in their care work roles. Continued reinforcement of equality during reviews is limited to questions which ensure that learners are not experiencing harassment in the workplace. Stereotypical comments used during training or assessment are not always challenged or used positively to raise the learners' awareness and improve practice.

48. ATL has a very efficient management information system that identifies and reports on the diversity of their learners. The reports are used effectively to analyse current learners against regional and national statistics and to set learner profile targets to comply with LSC requirements. There is no effective use of information on equality to evaluate the retention and achievement of the identified groups, or to set targets and plan actions to support the improvement of retention and achievement rates. Insufficient attention is paid to recording the employers' equality arrangements. There is an over reliance on other agencies to check equality policies as part of the registration requirements.

### **Quality improvement**

### **Contributory grade 4**

49. The arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory and are clearly specified in a set of procedures. A systematic approach is used to sample assessment and assessor activity. Staff regularly discuss practices at supervision meetings, and assessor and standardisation meetings. However, some assessment planning and practices are inconsistent and some record-keeping is incomplete.

50. The collection, analysis and use of feedback from learners, staff and employers is satisfactory. Learners and employers' views are requested once a year. All employers are contacted by telephone six weeks after their learners start the programme to check that they are satisfied with learners' progress. Feedback is collated and actions are taken to improve provision. Many of the actions that require giving information, changing or increasing assessor visits are completed quickly. Other, more complex, actions are more difficult to monitor.

51. ATL produced its first self-assessment report in 2005. The process of identifying strengths and weaknesses involved staff, and took into account feedback from learners,

employers and other stakeholders. However, some of the staff are not fully aware of the purpose and content of the report. Some of the strengths and weaknesses in the report matched those identified by inspectors but some of the strengths are no more than normal practice. Inspectors added additional strengths and weaknesses.

52. The approach to improving the quality of provision is inadequate. The variations within and between care and early years apprentices and ETP learners indicates that ATL's activities to ensure a good experience for the learners are not being achieved consistently. The retention, achievement and progress of the different groups of learners varies. Observations of key learning processes do not make use of grades, and the process is carried out by one member of staff who is not qualified. Additional support for literacy, numeracy and language needs is not identified or delivered appropriately. Some quality assurance arrangements are not supported by policies, and some new policies and procedures are not sufficiently established. There is some incomplete record-keeping, and some inconsistencies in assessment planning and practices. However, the management information system, the intranet and the good staff training and development, have contributed to the organisation being able to monitor the learners' progress and staff performance effectively.

53. The arrangements to manage subcontracted training are inadequate. Despite improving communication and monitoring arrangements, the working relationships between Scientiam's training and development advisers and ATL's assessors are not contributing to improving the learners' experience. The assessors are not involved in the preparation of the individual learning plans or progress reviews.



## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Health, public services and care

### Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Social care</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	49	3
Employer training pilot	225	3
<b>Early years</b>		
Apprenticeships for young people	50	4
Employer training pilot	38	3

54. ATL delivers training across Staffordshire, Lancashire, Wiltshire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Leicestershire and the Wirral. The head office is based in Biddulph, with satellite offices in Crewe and Manchester. The company offers training in health and social care to include NVQs and modern apprenticeships in care, early years and playwork. ATL works with another provider to provide training and assessment for learners on the apprenticeship programmes in care and early years. The other provider is responsible for recruitment, planning learning and carrying out reviews.

55. Most of the learners on ETP are recruited through Chamberlinks/Business Links, conferences, careers events or directly through employers. Information about training is available through the company website and marketing materials. Group training sessions take place at the main office site or in employers' premises.

56. In care, there are 225 learners on the ETP programmes and 49 apprentices. Fifty apprentices and 38 ETP learners are on the early years programmes. Fourteen per cent of learners on care programmes are men and 11 per cent of early years learners are men. The planned period of learning is 26 months for advanced apprentices, 14 months for apprentices and 12 months for ETP learners.

### **Social care**

#### *Strengths*

- good retention and progress for advanced apprentices
- satisfactory and improving achievements for ETP learners
- effective questioning and activities to develop knowledge

#### *Weaknesses*

- slow progress for some apprentices
- late assessment of practical skills on ETP
- ineffective induction

## Achievement and standards

57. Retention and progress are good for advanced apprentices. Of the 14 advanced apprentices who started in 2002-03, there was 50 per cent retention and achievement. In 2003-04, seven learners started, 43 per cent have completed the framework and 29 per cent are still in learning. To date, 15 per cent of the learners who started in 2004-05 have completed the framework.

58. Retention and achievement for learners on ETP is improving. The programme was introduced in 2003-04 when 605 learners were recruited, of whom 66 per cent were retained for the planned duration and 66 per cent achieved the NVQ. In 2004-05, 306 learners joined the programme, 49 per cent achieved the NVQ and 30 per cent are still in learning. Of the 92 learners still in learning, 31 are near completion with internal verification planned for the end of March 2006. Of the 149 learners recruited in 2005-06, 8 per cent have achieved the NVQ to date.

59. Achievement for apprentices is satisfactory. During 2002-03, 46 learners were recruited, 30 per cent completed the framework and 2 per cent are still in learning. The intake for retention in 2003-04 was reduced to 14 learners, 21 per cent of whom have completed the framework and two learners are still in learning. In 2004-05, 29 learners were recruited, 3 per cent have completed the framework to date, and 59 per cent are still in learning. Of the 11 who started in 2005-06, 64 per cent are still in learning.

60. The development of skills and background knowledge is satisfactory. Learners demonstrate a clear understanding of the principles of support care practices. Learners and employers speak of improved confidence in discussing case histories, and increased clarity when making decisions about the best care for clients.

61. Progress for some apprentices has been slow. Of the current 26 learners, three are outside their planned period of training. One learner has been in training since 2002-03 and another since 2003-04. Of the 17 learners who started in 2004-05, five are making slow progress towards the NVQ. One learner is near completion of three NVQ units and four learners are near completion of one unit. One learner of the 17 who started in 2004-05 has started working towards key skills units. ATL has continued to support the learners who are outside their funding date.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	7		20		7		14	100									
Retained*	0		3		5		7	50									
Successfully completed	0		3		3		7	50									
Still in learning	7		14		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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	11		29		14		46										
Retained*	0		1		4		15										
Successfully completed	0		1		3		14										
Still in learning	7		17		1		1										

\*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																	
Employer training pilot	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	149		306		605	100											
Retained*	12		151		400	66											
Successfully completed	12		150		400	66											
Still in learning	133		92		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

## The quality of provision

62. Assessors frequently visit learners at work to review their progress. They use very effective questioning techniques during individual coaching and assessment sessions. Questions are probing and relevant, and effectively encourage learners to think and to explore their own ideas. Learners are well motivated and confident enough to investigate background knowledge information. Assessors encourage learners to expand their knowledge and understanding of caring for individuals and of the NVQ requirements. Apprentices take an active role in action-planning and are confident enough to make contact with their assessors between visits. Learners are visited at times which suit their shift patterns. Most assessors are very flexible in the arrangements for visits which take place every three to four weeks.

63. Satisfactory working relationships have developed between most employers and assessors, and communications are good. Some employers are well informed of the outcome of the assessment visits by assessors. Employers use assessment action plans effectively to plan rotas so that direct observations and other activities can take place. Learners are included in training opportunities in the workplace to support mandatory units.

64. Assessors complete a review form at every visit. Appropriate targets are set to reflect the outcome of assessment activities. However, there are few medium- or long-term targets and a new individual learning plan is not yet used effectively to link short-term targets to qualification outcomes. Employers are not always present at the reviews. Employers are given a copy of the review paperwork and use it to support learners between visits.

65. Assessment is satisfactory. Assessment is generally well planned and learners

understand how, when and where they will be assessed. An appropriate range of assessment methods is used. However, there are some incomplete assessments, for example, there is insufficient direct observation and an over reliance on written evidence for some learners. Some of the documents are incomplete. Signatures and dates are missing.

66. Observations of competency are completed late and in some instances close to the end of training on ETP programmes. ETP learners who have been training for seven months of a 12-month programme, have been helped to develop their background knowledge evidence. However, they have had little or no assessment of their practical competences. Some learners have completed all the assignment and written work for their NVQ, but have not yet been observed.

67. Induction is ineffective and does not give sufficient details of health and safety, equality of opportunity, and policies and procedures. The information given mostly relates to the requirements of the NVQ. ATL has recently produced a new pack to deal with these shortcomings. Learners have little recollection of the induction process. Apprentices have an induction with both Scientiam and ATL, and find it difficult to understand the role of each provider.

68. Initial assessment is not completed as part of the induction process. There are no formal methods for assessing individual learning needs. When spelling and grammatical errors are identified by assessors during the training, learners are visited more frequently or have access to dictating machines. Some learners have expressed difficulties with written work and have received extra help from their assessor.

### **Leadership and management**

69. Communication is good between assessors and managers. Regular assessor and manager meetings are used to monitor learners' progress. The tutor/assessors who support on- and off-the-job training are experienced and have appropriate qualifications. Assessors and internal verifiers have good opportunities for training and development and are well supported by ATL. Internal verification is satisfactory. Regular standardisation meetings are well attended and sampling calendars adequately cover awarding body requirements. However, some portfolios do not include learners' records and assessment feedback forms. Employers complete questionnaires on the quality of provision, but they are not always informed of the results.

70. There are some inconsistencies in the monitoring of training, particularly health and safety in the workplace. Some training resources are out of date. Some task books include errors, are produced in different formats and do not contain instructions to advise the learner how to complete the work.

### ***Early years***

#### ***Strengths***

- good retention and progress for ETP learners
- good individual coaching for ETP learners
- flexible and responsive support for learners

### Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates for apprentices
- inadequate extension and development of knowledge for advanced apprentices
- inconsistent assessment planning for apprenticeship programmes
- ineffective initial assessment
- poor induction on ETP

### Achievement and standards

71. Retention rates are good on the ETP programme. Retention rates for 2003-04 are 57 per cent, with 57 per cent achievement. Retention stands at 98 per cent for 2004-05, with 25 per cent achievement. Twenty-two of the remaining 30 learners are on target to finish by April 2006. On the ETP programme, learners are progressing well. The ETP programme allows them to focus on their job role and gives them a better awareness of their roles and responsibilities. Many are able to better relate theory to practice. Employers report an increase in motivation, better team working, learners taking the initiative during group activities and making a better contribution to staff meetings.

72. Most of the learners produce a satisfactory standard of work in their portfolios. Some portfolios are well structured and well referenced. Some learners have a good range of relevant certificates in areas such as paediatric first aid, foundation training, birth to eight, outdoor play, music and movement, healthy eating and child protection. Learners are proud of their portfolios, keen to talk through them and some learners on ETP programmes make good use of the internet to research answers to questions.

73. Achievement rates are poor on the early years apprenticeship programmes. Of the 17 learners who started in 2003-04, 18 per cent have completed the framework and 24 per cent are still in learning.

74. Between 2002 and 2004, 35 learners started the apprenticeship programmes and only eight completed the framework. Of the 26 starts in 2004-05, three have completed the framework and eight are still in learning. Of the current 50 early years apprentices and advanced apprentices, eight are outside their planned training time.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	7		44		17		25										
Retained*	0		2		7		6										
Successfully completed	0		2		3		4										
Still in learning	7		26		4		2										

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		26		21	100	14	100								
Retained*	0		3		10	43	4	17								
Successfully completed	0		3		4	17	4	25								
Still in learning	3		8		0	0	0	100								

\*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																
Employer training pilot	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9		51		21	100										
Retained*	0		20		12	57										
Successfully completed	0		13		12	57										
Still in learning	8		30		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

## The quality of provision

75. Individual coaching and support on the early years ETP programme are very effective. Assessors are knowledgeable and frequently check learning and understanding. Gaps in knowledge are dealt with effectively through extended questioning and advice on other sources of information. Feedback from learners indicates that they benefit from this individual support and it gives them enough confidence to complete the written questions, and in some cases to do further reading and research.

76. Flexible and responsive assessor support is particularly effective. Assessors visit learners on a three- to four-weekly basis on ETP, and apprentices are visited every two to four weeks. Assessors set challenging targets which helps most learners make good progress. Learners like the fact that assessors are accessible and willing to help clarify questions they do not understand, and in finding different assessment methods to meet individual learning needs. Learners contact assessors at any time through text messaging and e-mail and this enables them to sort out concerns promptly.

77. Employer engagement is satisfactory. Most employers are interested in the learners' programme and provide relevant witness statements for portfolios. Many of the employers arrange relevant training for their staff to support the programme. Working relationships and communication are good between the provider's staff and employers. However, some employers would like written reports on their learners' progress through the units of the NVQ and other qualifications. Assessors carry out satisfactory progress reviews for ETP learners. Realistic short-term targets are set and monitored at each visit.

78. Assessment is satisfactory on ETP programmes. There is some good use of oral questions to complete units. Some well-planned professional discussion takes place and flexible assessment visits are arranged to fit in with shift patterns. Some assessors produce

detailed, well-referenced observations at the time of the observation, while others take the paperwork away and return it at the next visit. Enthusiastic, experienced learners complete written questions ahead of their observations, but their progress is delayed while they await observations.

79. Assessment planning is inconsistent on apprenticeship programmes. Some employers are not fully involved in learners' assessment planning. Many learners take responsibility for negotiating their future assessments with employers, but their assessor does not adequately check this. In some instances, assessment plans do not include health and safety, the ratio of children to adults or the effect on individual children. In some instances, assessment decisions are made before questions are asked.

80. Initial assessment on ETP programmes is poor. Literacy and numeracy skills are not tested and some learning needs are apparent only during training and assessment tasks, or if the learner asks for additional help. The recently introduced individual learning plan is not used effectively and learners are not yet aware of the importance of long-term target-setting. On apprenticeship programmes, Scientiam's staff carry out an initial assessment but the results are not always communicated effectively to ATL's assessors so that they can prepare the individual learning plans.

81. The induction for apprentices is satisfactory. They attend an induction with Scientiam's staff, followed by an induction by ATL which outlines the apprenticeship framework. Many of the learners are able to recall the content of their induction and are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Induction onto the ETP programme is poor. Explanations on the NVQ process are satisfactory, as are the instructions for portfolio-building. However, some learners find that too much information is given in a short space of time. Insufficient information is given on equality and diversity at induction and little reinforcement takes place. Many of the ETP learners have health and safety training in the nursery or classroom from their employers. However, health and safety is not sufficiently covered during induction and some learners are not clear about their responsibilities.

82. Some of the assessors do not extend and develop learners' knowledge on advanced apprenticeship programmes. Questions which are asked during the individual coaching are not detailed. Written work and independent study is set at too low a level for advanced apprentices. Testing of learners' understanding of concepts such as social, emotional, intellectual or physical development is not thorough enough. Learners are not asked questions which will develop their supervisory skills.

### **Leadership and management**

83. Management of staff performance is good. Performance data is used effectively to evaluate the learners' performance and to analyse the extent to which assessors have met their targets. Assessors meet each month with the operations manager to review retention and progress. Three-monthly appraisals are used to identify development opportunities. Internal verification is satisfactory. Standardisation meetings are used to support assessors and to update them on the new awards. Internal verifiers give very clear feedback on new documents. However, sampling plans do not always ensure that learners' work is sampled throughout the programme. Staff are not fully aware of quality improvement arrangements. They are unfamiliar with monitoring activity, except for internal verification.

