

INSPECTION REPORT

Damar Training Solutions

30 June 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

Damar Training Solutions

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Damar Training Solutions (Damar) was established in 1980 and is a private limited company. It has recently been purchased by the managing director and two co-directors. The company is situated in the centre of Stockport. It provides work-based learning for young people, which is funded by Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council (LSC). It also carries out commercial training for individuals and businesses.
2. There are currently 129 modern apprentices on work-based learning programmes across the company, of whom 53 are apprentices and 76 are advanced apprentices. The company currently employs 12 staff, of whom 11 are full time and one is part time.
3. Stockport's population, based on the 2001 census, is 284,402, of whom 73.4 per cent are employed in the service sector. In April 2006, the rate of unemployment in Stockport was 1.6 per cent, compared with the national average of 2 per cent. The 2001 census shows that 4.3 per cent of the population of Stockport are from minority ethnic groups, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent, although in some Stockport wards there are considerably higher proportions.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** More specifically, Damar's leadership and management and arrangements for quality improvement are good. Its arrangements for equality of opportunity are satisfactory and the business administration and law provision is good.
5. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently detailed and does not have an appropriate action plan. Self-assessment grades matched those of the inspection team.
6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** Most weakness identified at the previous inspection have been remedied. There has been a significant improvement in success rates, which are now good. Damar takes appropriate steps to rectify weaknesses identified through its customer surveys and lesson observation system.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR DAMAR TRAINING SOLUTIONS:

- improve the promotion of equality of opportunity
- further improve the timely completion of frameworks
- strengthen the self-assessment report
- improve action-planning across the organisation

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

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

Business administration and law		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Administration</i>		2
Apprenticeships for young people	107	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The main area of learning, business administration and law, was graded. The inspection team did not grade information and communications technology (ICT) as there were insufficient numbers to be inspected separately.

Number of inspectors	2
Number of inspection days	8
Number of learners interviewed	9
Number of staff interviewed	16
Number of employers interviewed	5
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	5

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. **Learners' overall success rates are good.** They have improved consistently over the past three years, from 49 per cent in 2003-04 to 70 per cent so far in 2005-06.

9. Learners achieve at least satisfactory standards in their oral and written work.

10. The slow progress of learners, noted at the previous inspection, has improved, but **there is still insufficiently timely achievement of frameworks by some learners.**

The quality of provision

11. Learners benefit from good training. **Damar provides well-planned, supportive and effective training** to develop learners' skills and careers. Initial advice and guidance, and induction, are thorough and helpful.

12. **Assessor/trainers know their learners well and skilfully manage their training and assessment.** Assessor/trainers are particularly well qualified and have a good understanding of the business context in which learners work. As at the previous inspection, learners are supported well by good employers, who offer a varied and appropriate range of learning opportunities. Resources to support training and learning are appropriate.

Leadership and management

13. **Damar manages its links with employers well** and is working with more large employers than at the time of the previous inspection. Communications and working relations are very good. Annual surveys of employers consistently reveal high rates of employer satisfaction.

14. **There has been a strong trend of continuous improvement in success rates over the past three years.** Most weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been rectified.

15. The use of management information data is satisfactory. A broad range of reports are used to monitor learners' progress and contribute to team and individual staff meetings.

16. Overall communications at Damar are satisfactory. Staff are well informed through weekly meetings with their team or line manager.

17. **The system for managing staff performance is good.** Challenging targets are set for assessor/trainers and are closely monitored. Staff development and appraisal are satisfactory. Although there is no formal training budget, staff have good opportunities for training and are encouraged in their professional development.

18. The provision of literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory and has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

19. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is adequately covered during their induction and reinforced through reviews. Procedures for dealing with complaints, bullying and harassment are satisfactory.

20. **At the previous inspection, Damar did not promote equality of opportunity sufficiently. This is still a weakness.** Damar has few learners from minority ethnic backgrounds and does not set formal targets for participation by gender, ethnicity or disability.

21. The self-assessment process includes all members of staff. The self-assessment report, is not sufficiently detailed and the judgements are not sufficiently supported by evidence. **Action-planning is weak across the company.**

Leadership and management

Strengths

- particularly effective management of links with employers
- good performance management
- good quality improvement activities

Weaknesses

- weak promotion of equality of opportunity
- weak action-planning

Business administration and law

Administration

Strengths

- good overall success rates
- good management and delivery of training

Weaknesses

- insufficiently timely completion of frameworks by some learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT DAMAR TRAINING SOLUTIONS:

- 'everyone is easy-going'
- 'assessors are really helpful'
- the range of additional courses

WHAT LEARNERS THINK DAMAR TRAINING SOLUTIONS COULD IMPROVE:

- 'the amount of time away from work that we are given to do course work'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly effective management of links with employers
- good performance management
- good quality improvement activities

Weaknesses

- weak promotion of equality of opportunity
- weak action-planning

22. The management of links with employers, a strength at the previous inspection, has been maintained and consolidated. Damar has increased the number of employers that have more than four learners, from two to 10. The way that assessor/trainers manage their links with employers has been simplified and communication has improved. Extra meetings, called 'large programme reviews', are held with employers that have more than four learners, to identify and respond to their training needs. Annual surveys of employers are carried out, which consistently reveal very high rates of employer satisfaction. As an example, one of the larger employers is very positive about the quality of training Damar offers. In particular, they point out that Damar responds very quickly to any problems, maintains excellent communications and gives learners a very thorough induction. Employers, and learners, also benefit from Damar's offer of additional qualifications for their supervisors, such as assessor A1 units and European computer driving licence qualifications, at no extra cost. Employers note the increased motivation of learners throughout their training and appreciate Damar's celebration of learners' success through an annual awards ceremony.

23. Damar has a good system for managing the performance of its assessor/trainers. It uses LSC targets for success rates as the basis for setting its own, more challenging targets. These are allocated to assessor/trainers and broken down to quarterly targets for framework achievement, which are very closely monitored at individual monthly meetings with the training manager. Management information is used well to support these meetings. A management information board in the staffroom clearly shows the progress each assessor/trainer is making against their targets.

24. The use of management information data, which was a weakness at the previous inspection, is much improved overall. In addition to the LSC database, Damar uses two other databases that can produce a broader range of reports to monitor learners' progress. Weekly reports are taken to the regular meetings held between the training manager and the assessor/trainers. The company's databases are accessible to all trainers. However, senior managers are not yet able to aggregate data from the different databases to allow for trend analysis.

25. Communications at Damar are satisfactory. Staff are well informed, through weekly meetings with their team or line manager. Every two to three months the company holds

a communication day for all staff. These occasions are used to communicate how the company is faring in relation to its key performance indicators. The meeting is also used to recognise and congratulate staff who have contributed the most in that period.

26. Staff development and appraisal are satisfactory. All staff are appraised annually. The process identifies targets and staff development needs for individuals, which line managers review throughout the year. The whole organisation has a monthly development day where staff, individually, in teams or as a whole, can focus on aspects of personal or organisational development. Although there is no formal training budget, staff have good opportunities for staff training and are encouraged in their professional development. For example, in the past year all assessor/trainers have either completed or are working towards a certificate in education. They all either have or are completing their assessor qualifications. Administrative staff are also taking appropriate qualifications. Damar does not currently have a staff development plan to link individual training needs with organisational requirements.

27. The provision of literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. All learners receive literacy and numeracy assessments that are recorded on individual learning plan and used to guide learning. Two members of staff have successfully completed a leadership qualification in managing skills for life. Resources are generally satisfactory. Training rooms are adequate and appropriately equipped. Damar has no specialist equipment but makes appropriate arrangements for those who may need such support.

28. Damar's attention to health and safety is satisfactory. All employers undergo a risk assessment and regular health and safety checks are carried out. All Damar's staff have had, or are undergoing, a criminal records bureau check.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

29. Learners' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is covered adequately during their induction and sufficiently reinforced through reviews. Procedures for dealing with complaints, bullying and harassment are also satisfactory. Most learners are aware of their rights and entitlements if they have a grievance. Complaints are dealt with effectively by managers and staff. There are examples of learners being supported well when they have faced difficulties with employers. Managers monitor the participation and achievement of learners by gender, ethnicity and disability appropriately. In the past two years, the achievement of male learners has been significantly lower than that of female learners. Damar has taken steps to remedy this and the current year shows considerable improvement, with success rates for men slightly above those for women. At the previous inspection, access arrangements for learners with mobility difficulties was identified as an area for improvement. Learners with restricted mobility can now use the building's lift.

30. At the previous inspection, Damar did not promote equality of opportunity sufficiently. This is still a weakness. Damar has few learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. Currently, the representation is 1.7 per cent compared with 4.3 per cent in the local population. No formal targets are set for participation by gender, ethnicity or disability. Damar's current equal opportunities policy does not refer to recent legislation and does not have an implementation plan. There has been no formal training for staff in equality and diversity. Such training is not yet a part of staff induction. However, staff

have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. Marketing materials are neutral and do not promote learning for any particular groups. Although the weak promotion of equality of opportunity was not identified in the self-assessment report, the new senior management team are aware of this weakness and have begun to take action to remedy it. For example, the company is forming links with some Black and minority community organisations. It is, however, too early to evaluate the effect of these measures.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

31. Since the previous inspection, the quality of Damar's provision has improved significantly. There has been a strong trend of continuous improvement in success rates. Most weaknesses from the previous inspection have been rectified. These include the weaknesses relating to literacy and numeracy support and management information. Since the previous inspection, the training team monitors learners who are outside their planned target achievement date much more closely, to improve timely achievement rates.

32. Damar also responds well to weaknesses identified by its various quality assurance mechanisms. For example, recent employer surveys revealed that many supervisors did not feel sufficiently involved in progress reviews. The process has been improved. There has also been a good focus on improving teaching and learning. All Damar's assessor/trainers either have or are working towards a certificate in education. Observations of assessors are carried out regularly and graded session observations, based on the Common Inspection Framework, have begun to be carried out.

33. Damar has a comprehensive set of quality assurance policies and procedures to ensure the close monitoring and standardisation of practices. Internal verification is well planned and systematically carried out. Surveys of employers and learners are carried out annually. The results feed into the self-assessment process and are acted on appropriately by the training manager.

34. The self-assessment process includes all members of staff. Damar sets aside a day for all staff to debate and discuss the company's strengths and weaknesses. Staff feel a strong sense of ownership of the resulting judgements. The managing director collates the report and staff have an opportunity to comment on the first draft. Although the grades in the self-assessment report matched those of the inspectors, the report itself was not sufficiently detailed and the judgements were not sufficiently supported by evidence.

35. Action-planning is weak across the company. The self-assessment report has no action plan or development plan attached. Damar does not have a quality improvement plan for the current year. Little formal planning arises from quality assurance activities such as the processes for gathering feedback from employers and learners.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration and law

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration		2
Apprenticeships for young people	107	2

36. Damar has 107 learners following modern apprenticeship programmes, all of whom are employed. Thirty-eight are on apprenticeship programmes, of whom 19 are in business administration, 10 in accountancy and nine in customer services. Of the 69 learners taking advanced apprenticeships there are 44 in business administration, 14 in accountancy and 11 in customer services. Learners are recruited through employers, Connexions or directly. Assessors visit learners at work at least monthly and carry out progress reviews quarterly. Training takes place at work and through planned programmes of training at Damar's offices, including for the technical certificates. Damar also has 14 learners following the Train to Gain programme in business-related areas. The provision is managed by the training manager, who is also the internal verifier. He is assisted by six assessor/trainers.

Administration

Strengths

- good overall success rates
- good management and delivery of training

Weaknesses

- insufficiently timely completion of frameworks by some learners

Achievement and standards

37. Learners' overall success rates are good. Low retention and achievement rates were a weakness at the previous inspection. Overall success rates have improved consistently over the last three years, from 49 per cent in 2003-04 to 70 per cent so far in 2005-06. Advanced apprenticeship rates have been slower to improve, but are now at 68 per cent in 2005-06. The rate for apprentices is 71 per cent. All rates are well above the national averages for overall successful completion of apprenticeship frameworks.

38. Learners' achievement of key skills has improved since the previous inspection. They are encouraged to take key skills tests above the level required by their programme. Learners have good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications, particularly in information technology (IT). They can choose from the wide range of courses that Damar offers to its commercial and fee-paying customers, and do not pay for these courses.

39. Learners achieve at least satisfactory standards in their oral and written work. They often make good progress in their training sessions. Their IT skills are good, which they

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apply to particularly good effect at work. They also develop significantly in confidence and in their communication skills. A significant number of learners on level 3 programmes have progressed from level 2 programmes with Damar.

40. The slow progress of learners, noted at the previous inspection, has improved, but there is still insufficiently timely completion of frameworks by some learners. Although rates have improved to well above the national averages in 2005-06, they are only at 42 and 44 per cent for apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships respectively.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	32	0	0	25	31
		timely	33	0	0	21	19
	2004-05	overall	52	0	0	31	34
		timely	63	0	0	21	21
	2005-06	overall	41	0	0	68	42
		timely	32	0	0	44	26
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	94	0	0	57	32
		timely	91	0	0	26	16
	2004-05	overall	79	0	0	63	38
		timely	72	0	0	22	21
	2005-06	overall	48	0	0	71	52
		timely	52	0	0	42	32

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

41. Learners benefit from good training. Together with employers, Damar provides well-planned, supportive and effective training to develop learners' skills and careers. Initial advice and guidance, and the induction process, are thorough and helpful. Learners' needs are accurately identified through initial assessment. Assessor/trainers use the outcomes well to help develop learning programmes matched to individual needs, including additional support where appropriate. They are particularly skilled at helping learners to maximise their potential by, for example, encouraging learners to study key skills at levels above that required by their modern apprenticeship.

42. Assessor/trainers know their learners well and skilfully manage their training and assessment. They work closely with learners to determine the right balance between on- and off-the-job training. Off-the-job training is good. A core of activities to support work for the technical certificates is supplemented if learners are identified as needing further development. The 'night college' provides good opportunities for learners to use Damar's facilities, such as computers, or receive extra support after their work. Learners are given significant responsibility in managing their programmes and in helping to determine their actions and targets for the future. Assessment is carefully planned and carried out

thoroughly, using a wide range of assessment methods. Learners and employers are well aware of assessment outcomes and what learners need to do to improve. Internal verification is thorough.

43. As at the previous inspection, learners are supported well by good employers that offer a varied and appropriate range of learning opportunities. Damar continues to work closely with employers to match learners and training programmes to jobs. Employers, especially learners' workplace supervisors, are fully involved in all the important aspects of learners' programmes. Damar is aware that it works with some employers who are less proactive.

44. Resources for training and learning are appropriate. Assessor/trainers are particularly well qualified in business-related disciplines and have a good understanding of the business context in which learners work. Staff development has a clear focus on improving teaching skills. All assessor/trainers are trained teachers or working towards becoming qualified. The training manager is training to become a subject learning coach. Learners have adequate access to IT and training accommodation is suitable. Physical access to training rooms and toilets is difficult for learners with significant mobility problems.

Leadership and management

45. The provision is managed well. The closely knit team of well-qualified and experienced staff work productively together. The training manager and the assessor/trainers are committed to the improvement of quality. Some good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Learners' overall success rates and the quality of training are now good and progress is being made with the more timely completion of frameworks.

46. Damar's commitment to securing equality and diversity is understood by staff. Learners are suitably introduced to aspects of equality and diversity at induction and are prompted to recall their knowledge and understanding at progress reviews. However, there is insufficient reinforcement of the initial induction messages.

47. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. However, there is not enough detail in the self-assessment report to support judgements and no weaknesses or satisfactory aspects are explicitly identified in the area of learning section. Judgements relating to the area of learning are in the leadership and management section and inspectors matched the two strengths identified. Staff carried out a fuller analysis of strengths and weaknesses for the area of learning but were unable to incorporate it into the report before the inspection.

