

ABRO Donnington

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering

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 and other governmental organisations. Approximately 850 staff work at ABRO's site at Donnington, which has areas for mechanical and electrical production. A training centre at the site employs six staff, including a training manager, who has overall responsibility for the training. Five of the staff are directly involved in training. The organisation recruits about 20 learners each year and trains a small number of apprentices for a local company. There are currently 64 learners, all of whom are advanced modern apprentices in engineering. Training is funded by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and through Shropshire LSC. In addition there are seven adult apprentices funded by ABRO Donnington. ABRO Donnington is accredited with the Investor in People standard, a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.
2. ABRO Donnington recruits its learners from the local area. The unemployment rate in Shropshire is 4.5%, compared with 5.4% in the West Midlands and 5.3% nationally. The 2001 census identified that Shropshire's minority ethnic groups represented 1.2% of the population, compared with 5.2% in Telford and Wrekin, 11.3% in the West Midlands and 9.1% nationally.
3. Learners follow a three-year apprenticeship programme. 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 national vocational qualification (NVQ). Training in basic mechanical and electrical skills for first-year learners is carried out in ABRO's training 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. During the first year staff from Wolverhampton College provide training for an appropriate technical certificate at ABRO's training centre. During the second and third year learners attend Wolverhampton College one day each week to complete their technical certificate. Training for key skills is provided by County Training, Shropshire at ABRO's training centre during the first year.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Engineering	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision and leadership and management are all good. Provision in engineering is also good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. ABRO Donnington has demonstrated that it has satisfactory capacity to improve. It has responded well to the findings of the previous inspection and has taken action to remedy the weaknesses and key challenges identified. The organisation makes good use of feedback from supervisors, training staff and learners and responds rapidly and effectively to opportunities to improve. Quality assurance arrangements are good and action plans are developed each year to drive forward improvements. Success rates have improved recently.
6. The provider recognises that the latest self-assessment report is poor. Despite the good quality assurance arrangements and wealth of information collected the organisation does not use this effectively to compile an appropriate self-assessment report. The report fails to make clear judgements about the quality of provision and does not attempt to grade the provision. Inspectors found the report unhelpful.

Key strengths

- Good achievement rate on advanced apprenticeship in 2006/07
- Good standard of learners practical skills
- Good on-the-job training
- Strong and clear strategic direction
- Good communications
- Good quality assurance arrangements

Key areas for improvement

- Poor self-assessment report

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

7. Achievement and standards are good. The achievement rate on advanced apprenticeship programmes was good in 2006/07 at 80%. Achievement rates were satisfactory for the previous two years at 60% and 70% respectively. All current learners make good progress towards achieving their full framework, although for some learners there has been a delay in completion of the framework because their course at a local further education college was discontinued. These learners are now making satisfactory progress on a new course. Learners have a good grasp of the various components of the apprenticeship framework, how much progress they are making, what remains to be achieved and how and when they will complete the remaining tasks. Success rates on key skills are good however, there is insufficient challenge for the more able learners who have already achieved the minimum required level for their apprenticeship framework.
8. Learners achieve a good standard of practical skills both in the training centre and the workplace. The standard of workplace training records and NVQ portfolios is good. Apprentices work on a wide variety of repair and refurbishment tasks to demanding industrial standards and deadlines. ABRO Donnington learners are successful at national competitions.
9. Some learners complete additional courses and qualifications such as Introduction to Management, Lean Manufacture, safe operation of overhead cranes, slinging and the Sixteenth Edition Electrical Regulations.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

10. The overall quality of provision is good. There is good on the job training. Apprentice masters and team leaders have a clear understanding of their role and continuously monitor learners' progress. They provide detailed witness testimony for assessors and contribute to learners' reviews. They ensure that apprentices' work is to industry standards and give them a good selection of work tasks that contribute towards their training programme. Ambitious targets have been set for the completion of the NVQ at Level 3 and learners, assessors, team leaders and apprentice masters work hard to meeting these targets. Teaching and learning in the training centre are satisfactory. Instructors have relevant industrial experience.
11. Training is well structured to meet the employer's needs. During induction learners are given comprehensive information about the requirements of each component of the apprenticeship programme. Health and safety is emphasised and reinforced. There are clear codes of conduct relating to learner behaviour.
12. The key skills programme is subcontracted to a local training provider. All key skills in the framework are completed during the first year of training. The key skills programmes take account of learners' prior attainment and the results of initial assessment tests but are not vocationally contextualised.

13. Assessment arrangements are good. Diverse methods including workplace observation are well used. Assessment is very frequent and thorough. Learners do not start their Level 3 NVQ until the end of the second year, however, this does not delay completion of the apprenticeship framework.
14. Learner reviews and progress reports are satisfactory and take place every eight weeks. Reviews are comprehensive and detailed and appropriate stakeholders are involved. Equality of opportunity is discussed during reviews but this is not formally recorded. Learners do not receive a written copy of their review and the agreed targets.
15. The apprenticeship at ABRO Donnington meets the needs of learners and employers well. Learners benefit from working to demanding industrial standards and the range of skill they learn equips them very well for work in the defence industry.
16. Support for learners is good. Staff and workplace supervisors provide effective technical and personal support. Learners are full employees of ABRO Donnington and benefit from the support services available to all staff. Apprentice masters provide clear and detailed technical support. The union provides strong support for the apprenticeship programme and for all learners whether or not they are members. Additional support for learners is effective. A learner with dyslexia receives good support at work and at college, including voice activated software and a proofreader for his written work.
17. Resources in the training centre and in the workplace are satisfactory. The workplace is equipped with a wide range of equipment and test facilities to industry standard.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

18. Leadership and management are good. ABRO Donnington provides a strong and clear direction for training apprentices. The organisation carefully considers its known and predicted future work activities and uses this to establish its need for skilled workers, much of which is provided through the apprentice programme. There is strong support for the apprenticeship programme from senior managers and the union. An apprentice board consisting of training staff, senior managers and the union oversee the programme. They meet twice each year to receive reports on progress and provide advice and support.
19. Communications are particularly good. Training staff have very good working relations with engineering managers and with the unions. Staff throughout the establishment are aware of the apprenticeship programme and make training staff aware of opportunities for learners to develop further their skills and knowledge. For example during the inspection an unusual and rare piece of equipment was delivered for repair. The manager telephoned the training department and arrangements were made for the learners to see the equipment that day. Training staff regularly visit the subcontracted college and maintain good communications. The training department makes good use of mobile telephones and text messaging services to keep in touch with learners. Learners regularly visit the training centre to meet with their assessor and with the training coordinator and staff are very well informed about the progress of each learner. Learners have a very good understanding of their apprenticeship framework and know what, and by when, they are expected to achieve.

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20. The establishment has implemented good quality assurance arrangements. Since the previous inspection it has introduced an effective quality framework and carefully audits all the activities within this framework. It makes good use of feedback from apprentices, supervisors and staff. Comprehensive service level agreements have been agreed with subcontractors. Subcontractors are closely monitored and ABRO Donnington acts quickly to eliminate poor practice. It has moved all of the learners to a new college since the previous inspection, in response to the poor service it received from the previous college. ABRO Donnington seeks regular reports from subcontractors and makes regular visits to the college to discuss learners' progress and any concerns. A comprehensive observation programme ensures that all instructors and assessors are observed at least annually and new members of staff more frequently. Progress reviews are also observed. Good records are kept of these observations and good feedback given. An action plan is produced annually from the various monitoring activities and this is used to drive improvements. Data on achievement and retention is kept and used to inform decisions. The data is not sophisticated but meets the needs of the establishment. The training department has set its own internal target of 80% for the success of apprentices and met this in 2007/08. It is on target to meet this in 2008/09. In addition to its own internal arrangements the establishment's training programme is audited by the MoD every two years.
21. The provider recognises that the latest self-assessment report is poor. Despite the good quality assurance arrangements and wealth of information collected the organisation does not use this effectively to compile an appropriate self-assessment report. The report fails to make clear judgements about the quality of provision and does not attempt to grade the provision. Inspectors found the report unhelpful.
22. The organisations approach to equal opportunities is satisfactory. ABRO Donnington has appropriate policies and procedures in place with regard to equality and diversity and takes seriously its responsibilities towards its employees. The organisation collects and analyses recruitment data relating to gender, ethnicity and age. Equality and diversity is a regular feature of the company-wide team briefing system. For example the February briefing included a reminder of the company's policy on the display of offensive materials and an informative section on harassment. The training department has endeavoured to attract applicants from underrepresented groups through its advertisements and publicity. Currently two learners are female and one is from a minority ethnic group. The organisation provides training to all staff on equality and diversity every 2 to 3 years and apprentices are included in this. In addition learners receive equality training during their induction and have a refresher course each year. During their regular reviews training staff check that learners are treated well and discuss any problems or difficulties they may have. However, there is insufficient testing of learners' individual understanding of equality and diversity which is weak in some cases.

What learners like:

- Learning something new every day
- The good training — ‘I’ve learnt a lot and I am only half way through’
- ‘I’ve learnt a lot of knowledge and skills from being on the shop floor’
- The first year in the training centre
- ‘The way you move around and get loads of variety’
- ‘I enjoy the hands on work’
- Being treated like an adult
- The support and help from staff
- The good long term prospects
- ‘It’s a good mixture of fun and hard work – it’s never boring’
- The good pay

What learners think could improve:

- More tasks that go towards making an end product rather than simple exercises
- To include vehicle electrics in the mechanical training
- More and better electrical training
- ‘The off-the-job training should be more relevant’
- ‘To be treated as adults in the training centre not as if we are still at school’
- A longer programme to get wider experience

