

Ministry of Defence - Army

Partial reinspection report

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Introduction

The provision was inspected in March 2009. The provision comprises some eight subject areas, not all of which were inspected during the last inspection. Overall effectiveness was satisfactory. The rest of the provision was found to be at least satisfactory, with only the health and public services (security) subject area being judged inadequate.

At the reinspection health and public services (security) provision was found to be satisfactory.

Context

The Ministry of Defence army apprenticeship programmes are managed strategically by the Directorate of Educational and Training Services (Army) DETS(A). Subcontracted training providers deliver additional training and assessment to fill the gaps between military training and the civilian apprenticeship or national vocational qualifications (NVQs). The external funding for training represents less than 1% of the Army's training budget.

The Army apprenticeship programme currently has 11,324 learners on trade-related apprenticeships, and 941 learners on Train to Gain NVQs. The health and public services (security) provision has 694 apprentices and 25 learners on Train to Gain programmes.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Success rates have improved significantly since the inspection. Overall success rates on the large apprenticeship programme have risen from 49% in 2007/08 to 84% in 2009/10. Over the same period, timely success rates have risen 24 percentage points, to 71%. Timely success rates on the much smaller Train to Gain programme have also risen to 86% in 2009/10.
- Learners develop good skills and knowledge, in addition to those normally provided by their military training, which are valued by learners and employers. The delivery of key skills training is now timely and contextualised effectively with military activities. Learners' literacy and numeracy skills improve well, as do their confidence and interpersonal skills.
- Teaching and learning remain satisfactory and improving. Much work has been initiated to develop a range of teaching strategies for use in military contexts. Quality mentors have taken suitable action to improve the consistency and accuracy of training providers' observations of teaching. However, this has not yet been extended to military training.
- Quality mentors provided through the Arms and Service Directors (A&SDs) have been successful in improving the subcontractors' understanding of the role and timing of reviews in helping learners to progress. Targets set for learners' NVQ completion are specific and the review process is satisfactory. However,

providers make insufficient use of reviews to plan learners' training and assessment or to reinforce learning about equality and diversity and safeguarding.

- The range of provision is satisfactory. Of the 36 infantry regiments, 34 now offer an appropriate apprenticeship. However, some infantrymen still do not have access to a suitable training course. At the previous inspection, 48% of security learners were suspended from training because they were on operational duties, for example in Afghanistan. At the re-inspection, the suspension rate was 23%.
- The Director General of Army Recruiting and Training has provided clear strategic direction and leadership to enhance awareness of the Army's apprenticeship programme. Staff throughout the infantry have a much greater understanding of the apprenticeships' importance. In many cases, understanding and awareness of its importance to soldiers' development are now good. However, an apprenticeship programme is still not available to many infantrymen.
- The Army's capacity to make and sustain improvements is good. Quality mentors provide very effective training and updates for A&SDs. The Army's self-assessment process is improving and becoming more analytical and self-critical. It makes good use of information gathered from the implementation of the quality improvement action plan. Subcontracted training provision is closely monitored and well managed.
- The A&SDs makes good use of data to monitor provision. Their training has been particularly effective in building capacity to interpret data. The analysis of data is shared very effectively across the Army to prompt action. In the infantry, A&SDs has introduced competitive performance tables which are very effective in stimulating commanding officers' commitment to the programme and their understanding of its benefits.
- Safeguarding learners and the promotion of equality and diversity are satisfactory. Pre-operational training on cultural awareness and diversity is particularly good. Learners are able to use their skills effectively in a wide variety of situations and among different cultures. The Army takes appropriate action to ensure that its policies and procedures are properly implemented, including by its civilian training providers.

What does the Ministry of Defence – Army need to do to improve further?

- Consolidate arrangements for the observation of teaching and learning and extend them to military training in order to improve the quality and consistency of training.
- Develop learners' progress reviews as a mechanism for planning their training and assessment and reinforcing their understanding, so that learners make better progress, particularly when on operations.
- Increase the proportion of soldiers taking apprenticeships by developing the understanding of all military staff, especially at company level, about the importance of the Army apprenticeship scheme and the progress that learners are making.
- Increase the access to provision within the infantry to enable more soldiers to participate in apprenticeships.

RE-INSPECTION: MAIN FINDINGS

Themes

Self-assessment and improvement planning

How has the self-assessment and post-inspection action/improvement plan been used to develop and drive improvement? Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in continuing to inculcate self-assessment and improvement planning into all aspects of the training delivery. Many of the actions initiated just before the last inspection are now embedded in normal practice.

Quality improvement plans are managed effectively by the A&SDs and they link closely with an overall Army improvement plan. All plans include targets with dates for actions and are appropriately detailed. Improvement plans are scrutinised effectively during regular meetings. The collation, management and effective use of management information have improved considerably and provide up-to-date reports on learners' progress. The performance of different groups of learners is analysed with good focus on learners who are suspended from training due to operational requirements.

Very effective training has been delivered to build the capacity and skills of all the designate officers in the A&SDs to enable them to manage and monitor the work of their training providers. This has improved the provision significantly and is now particularly effective. The recent introduction of a performance commentary has been instrumental in focusing A&SDs on analysing and monitoring the performance of training providers and on learners' success rates. The infantry has effective quality improvement action plans to monitor key areas for improvement and these are regularly reviewed through the performance commentary.

Outcomes for learners

What improvements have been made in the overall outcomes for learners? Significant progress

The significant progress identified in the monitoring visit has continued. The overall success rates since the last inspection have improved and are currently 84%. Train to Gain timely success rates have also improved and are good at 86%.

At the original inspection significant numbers of learners were suspended from training whilst on operational duties in Afghanistan and Iraq. The infantry A&SD has worked hard to reduce this to 23%. Particularly good use is made of journals, especially whilst on operations, to help learners provide evidence of their work when they are suspended from the programme. Fewer than four per cent of learners are now beyond their planned end date.

Learners' work is good. Portfolios are well organised and clearly referenced. They contain good evidence derived from the workplace which is used effectively to demonstrate competence. Learners make very good progress given their starting points. Support given for literacy and numeracy is now much more effective. Key skills rightly begin at the start of the programme. Health and safety are addressed thoroughly throughout training.

The improved management and analysis of learners' performance ensures that the A&SDs and senior staff in the battalions can monitor learners' progress and question training providers when progress stops or is slow.

Quality of provision

What is the capacity of the Army apprenticeship programme to make and sustain improvements? Reasonable progress

Staff in charge of the Army apprenticeship scheme have continued to make reasonable progress in developing and improving the entire programme. Several improvements developed specifically to enhance the infantry programme have been shared effectively across the rest of the provision. Quality mentors delivered very effective training to the A&SDs, which has developed their capacity to analyse and use performance data to manage their training providers and to monitor success rates. Challenging targets have been set to provide a clear focus on improvement and outcomes for learners. Performance against these targets is monitored regularly and this activity contributes to improvement overall.

Training providers and A&SDs have good access to the web-based portal, which contains particularly useful information and guidance, and examples of good practice. Partners have easy access to resources to support quality improvement and contract management.

What progress has been made in monitoring and setting of targets to improve learners' review process? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, learners' progress reviews were inadequate. The Army has made reasonable progress to improve the quality of reviews and they are now satisfactory. It has piloted the review processes and made substantial revisions which have improved their consistency and quality. The purpose of reviews is now clearer and they fit more closely with learners' work patterns and progress. Review records provide better information on learners' achievement. Reviews are well organised and documented, although greater emphasis is required in order to develop learners' responsibility for their own learning. Learners' supervisors are informed of the outcomes of reviews and make relevant comments.

The Army has provided training providers with detailed and specific guidance on target setting. Targets for learners to complete their NVQ are now more specific. Reviews are not used effectively to reinforce equality and diversity issues. The Army

has commissioned training for staff in equality and diversity to improve their reinforcement during reviews. However, the Army's work to establish progress reviews as a mechanism for planning learners' training and assessment to improve their progress is not yet complete.

Leadership and management

How has the sharing and management of good practice and continuing professional development improved? Reasonable progress

Reasonable progress has been made in sharing good practice and building the capacity of staff to better manage and understand how to improve training programmes. Training is evaluated thoroughly by the A&SD staff. Effective training is provided to all A&SD staff by the Army apprenticeship quality mentors.

Training about quality improvement has been particularly important in helping the A&SDs to understand the purpose and usefulness of quality improvement planning as a tool to support the self-assessment process. A web-based portal has been developed and is now used effectively to disseminate information across all the programmes. However, those staff entirely on the military network are still unable to gain access to this information.

Much good work has also been done to ensure the Army is well advanced and prepared for the introduction of functional skills, to ensure learners are not disadvantaged when functional skills are implemented.

How has the quality improvement process had an impact on monitoring teaching and learning? Reasonable progress

At the previous inspection, insufficient attention had been paid to improving the quality of teaching and learning. Reasonable progress has been made to rectify this. Effective arrangements for evaluating the quality of teaching and learning and promoting improvement have been developed. The Army closely monitors the quality of training providers' work. The A&SDs moderates observations and asks questions on trends in the regular performance meetings. These actions have identified areas for improvement in the observation system successfully. For example, they have identified that some observations are graded inaccurately and provide insufficient information to aid improvement. Good guidance has been produced on judging the quality of sessions. Staff use the guidance to improve the consistency and accuracy of observations of training and assessments to develop a clear picture of the quality of teaching and learning across the provision. Teacher training and qualifications are being more widely promoted to encourage instructors to make better use of a wider range of teaching strategies. Monitoring and improvement activities are well documented and followed through in the quality improvement plan. However, it is still too soon to see the full extent of these activities on the quality of teaching and learning.

What has been done to ensure greater participation, involvement and understanding of the apprenticeship programme by senior staff in the infantry?

Significant progress

Significant progress has been made in ensuring senior staff from within the infantry, and the Army generally, understand and support the apprenticeship programmes. The Director General of Army Recruiting and Training Division (ARTD) has provided very effective strategic direction and leadership. Senior staff, especially the commanding officers of infantry battalions, now understand and fully appreciate the importance of the apprenticeship for their soldiers. These commanding officers now play an important part in monitoring and managing the training providers through a series of quarterly meetings administered by the A&SD. A very well-designed career management poster clearly demonstrates the career paths, qualifications and progression routes for infantry soldiers.

Despite the much improved communications with senior staff, more is still required to ensure that training providers work closely with the staff in the company units. Information is not always passed down the chain of command effectively to staff responsible for the operational management of learners.

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