Alliance Learning Limited

Inspection report

Unique reference number:	50387
Name of lead inspector:	Bob Busby HMI
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Type of provider:	Independent learning provider
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Information about the provider

1. Alliance Learning Ltd (Alliance) is a private company limited by guarantee and a registered charity managed by a group of member companies. It was formed in April 2001 from the merger of two training providers. Prior to this, the company traded for over 40 years as Bolton Training Group. The company has a learndirect training centre in Leigh and a head office in Horwich. Alliance employs 96 staff and provides work-based learning for 409 young people and 100 adults. Learners work towards advanced apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in engineering and manufacturing technologies, business, administration and law, information and communication technology (ICT), warehousing and distribution, customer service, and health, public services and care. The Skills Funding Agency funds the training. The company also delivers training through learndirect and has a large commercial arm delivering specialised training courses. Government funding represents approximately 70% of Alliance's business.

2. Warehousing and distribution programmes and the learndirect provision were not directly inspected; evidence from these programmes contributed to the leadership and management judgements.

3. Alliance is led by 10 voluntary Board Members, each of whom own or play a lead role in companies that operate within the sectors offered by Alliance, and are based within the Greater Manchester area. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) has day-to-day responsibility for the company, working with a team of three Executive Managers. The manager of the commercial department is also the deputy CEO.

4. The company operates in disadvantaged areas. The proportion of unemployed people in Bolton between January and December 2009 was 8.8%, which is slightly higher than the proportion for the North West, which stood at 8.5%, and the national rate of 7.7%. In 2009 approximately 47% of pupils achieved five GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics, slightly below the national average for maintained schools. The area has high levels of ethnic diversity. According to the 2001 Census, 87.2% of residents are White British, compared with 92.2% for the North West, and 87% for England. Nine per cent of residents are Asian or Asian British.

5. Alliance does not provide training on behalf of other providers.

6. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:

    ■ Training 2000 (technical certificates in engineering)

    ■ Wigan and Leigh College (technical certificates in engineering)

    ■ Northstar Training (NVQs in warehousing)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Provision for young learners: 14 to 16	134 part time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	215 learners 288 apprentices

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3

Capacity to improve	Grade 3

	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject Areas	Grade
Health, public services and care	2
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	3
Business, administration and law	3
Preparation for life and work	3

Overall effectiveness

7.   The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Outcomes for learners and the quality of provision are both satisfactory, as are leadership and management. Alliance has shown that it has satisfactory capacity to improve. The provision in health, public services and care is good. The provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies, business, administration and law and in preparation for life and work is satisfactory. The provider is making good progress in improving overall success rates, and timely success rates are close to the national rates, although there are still variations between subject areas. Teaching and learning is satisfactory but the arrangements to quality assure teaching and learning are insufficient. The provider's promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory, as are arrangements for ensuring that learners are safe. Alliance has made satisfactory progress with some of the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. Literacy and numeracy support for adults is now satisfactory and monitoring of subcontractors is now sufficient. However, although self-assessment processes have now improved and are satisfactory, there is still insufficient participation by employers in the

self-assessment process. Action planning, following self-assessment, remains an area for improvement in a few subject areas. The quality of accommodation and resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners have good access to information technology to support their learning. Overall success rates have improved consistently over three years and are now around national rates but need further improvement in a few subject areas. Partnership working is particularly strong throughout the organisation.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Framework success rates have improved significantly in the last three years. Outcomes on apprenticeship programmes have improved to around national rates but success rates on advanced apprenticeships, although improving, remain low. Most learners develop good work-related knowledge and skills, which they apply very effectively in their workplaces.

- Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are high, particularly at level 3 where success rates are very good, well above national rates. However, success rates on Train to Gain programmes at level 2 and on Skills for Life programmes lag behind national rates.

- On Train to Gain programmes, men and women achieve equally well but women succeed in a timelier manner. Women apprentices succeed better than men, exceeding the national rates, whilst men lag behind national rates. Significant variations exist between success rates across different sector subject areas and for those who have declared a learning difficulty and/or disability.

- Learning and development officers (LDOs) offer learners a satisfactory induction into their learning programmes. Staff use reviews effectively to revise topics discussed at induction, refreshing and extending learners' knowledge and understanding. There is good involvement of employers in the review process. However, target setting is not a priority during engineering and manufacturing technologies reviews.

- Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy competencies and learning styles is satisfactory; this leads to good arrangements for additional literacy and numeracy support when required. However, there is no initial assessment of learners' ICT knowledge and skills. Staff do not prioritise Skills for Life learning goals sufficiently and do not use them to measure individual progression and achievement.

- In health, public services and care, teaching, training and assessment are good, while they are satisfactory in the other sector subject areas inspected. Integration of key skills into apprenticeship programmes is effective. Insufficient use is made of information learning technology (ILT) to promote and support learning in all occupational areas. Arrangements for observing teaching and learning lack rigour and moderation is insufficiently robust.

- Progression opportunities are good and many learners take advantage of them, notably in engineering and manufacturing technology where, in 2009/10, 82% of apprentices went on to advanced apprenticeships. Progression rates from

programme-led apprenticeships are low. Programmes successfully meet the needs and interests of learners and their employers. However, in business, administration and law, the range of programmes is limited.

■   Support for learners is good. LDOs visit learners regularly in their workplaces to coach and assess them, and to review their progress. Many tutors deliver good pastoral support that effectively helps learners to overcome their difficulties and promotes their learning and development. In health and social care there are instances of support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities being outstanding.

■   Change is well managed; operational management is good in most areas. Business planning is careful and reflects regional and national priorities. Communications are good within Alliance. Partnerships with employers, schools, colleges and the local university are very strong and highly beneficial. The company is very well represented on local and national committees and working groups.

■   The use of management information for analysing and reporting learners' achievement is effective. Progress is monitored well and staff take prompt actions to address issues raised. Alliance recognises that the performance management system requires further development. Insufficient use is made of data at curriculum level to monitor progress.

■   The company has made good progress to narrow achievement gaps significantly in the current year. Many current developments to improve the promotion of equality and diversity are at an early stage. Participation by different groups of learners, targeted by Alliance, has not increased.

■   Involvement of staff in the self-assessment process is good. However, there is no direct involvement of employers in Alliance's self-assessment. Some use is made of learners' and employers views, gathered through surveys and questionnaires, to inform the self-assessment report.

What does Alliance need to do to improve further?

■   Continue to monitor learner progress closely, ensuring that learners understand what they need to do, so that they progress more quickly and complete their qualifications within the agreed timescales.

■   Analyse and use data, particularly trend data and data on the performance of different groups of learners more effectively, to set and meet challenging targets to narrow the achievement gap between different groups of learners.

■   Ensure that teaching, training and assessment are of the highest quality, making effective use of ILT to promote and support learning, so that all learners receive outstanding provision.

■   Ensure that targets are accurately defined and clearly prioritised in progress reviews, fully informing learners about what is required.

■   Initially assess learners' occupational aptitude and their ICT knowledge and skills when they join a training programme, to improve the planning of their

learning. Prioritise learning goals in Skills for Life so that individual progression and achievement can be measured more accurately.

- Improve the rigour of observations of teaching and learning and progress reviews, by further training of observers, producing improvement plans action following each observation and arranging for the sharing of good practice. Establish a robust system of moderation to increase the reliability of the observation process.

- Promote and increase the participation of underrepresented groups in all areas of learning, to challenge occupational stereotypes and to ensure that the percentage of minority ethnic learners reflects the local population.

- Develop the self-assessment process to ensure that views of all stakeholders and each sector subject area are fully and accurately evaluated to support planning for, and implementation of, quality improvement initiatives.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- being treated fairly and respectfully which helps build confidence and self-esteem

- good support and additional help from the LDOs through visits to the workplace, phone, email and text, with extra sessions made available where necessary

- gaining qualifications and additional qualifications which help gain employment

- training is closely related to work, improves job-related skills and performance in the workplace which leads to increased responsibility at work

- manageable workloads which take into account personal circumstances

- extra help to improve literacy and numeracy quickly

- friendly, approachable, knowledgeable and helpful staff who are good role models

- having fun while learning

- getting on with learning independently – not being watched all the time.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the confused start to the course, dealing with too many people in the early stages

- better notice and information on examinations and assessments

- the cramped classrooms that are too small for the number of learners in them

- less time in the classroom – more access to practical training

- better ICT equipment to allow faster processing

- more relevant course content in some of the qualifications

- provision of improved recreational facilities

■ increased rate of learning and progress at the training centre.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

■ good communication and feedback on learners' progress

■ fast reaction and support from Alliance to any emerging issues

■ good links between on and off the job training

■ LDOs are very knowledgeable and committed and promote high standards

■ good information and advice

■ a professional and effective service which directly meets training needs.

What employers would like to see improved:

■ less changes in personnel at the start of the course

■ better support when dealing with learners' personal problems or performance in the workplace

■ provide more specialised skills training or help with placements at other employers to widen learners' skill set

■ better management of distractions from other learners in the training centre which detract from the training

■ more information on the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement   Grade 3

8. Alliance has made recent substantial improvements to learners' achievement rates, which overall were close to the national average in the previous full year. However, there is not yet a sound track record of sustained improvement, and significant variations exist within and between the different types of provision and occupational areas. Target setting focuses well on improving outcomes for all learners but is not sufficiently ambitious. The company has an appropriate management structure and sufficient staff and resources to implement its plans for improvement.

9. Staff and users' views contribute effectively to the self-assessment process although there is no direct involvement of employers. Much of the self-assessment is broadly accurate, however, not enough consideration is given to outcomes for learners. Most of the grades in the self-assessment are over-estimated. Quality improvement plans are thorough and monitored closely to identify both progress and impact.

Outcomes for learners   Grade 3

10. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall framework success rates at just over 70%, and timely success rates at around 56%, are broadly satisfactory, showing an improving trend and now approaching national averages. Significant variations exist between different subject areas. For example, success rates in health, public services and care are high, whilst they are much lower in engineering.

11. Outcomes on apprenticeships have steadily improved; overall apprenticeship success rates are now almost 73%, just above the national average and timely success rates are now around the national average at almost 60%.

12. Success rates and timely success rates on Train to Gain programmes are high, particularly at level 3. Overall success rates on Train to Gain programmes are 86%, well above the national average. Timely success rates of almost 73% are also slightly above the national average. Overall success rates on Train to Gain programmes at level 3, are very high at over 91%, well above national rates. Timely success rates on Train to Gain programmes at level 3 are over 76%, again well above the national average.

13. On Train to Gain programmes, there is little difference between the overall performance of males and females but women succeed in a timelier manner. On apprenticeships, women exceed both the national overall and timely success rates, whilst men lag behind the national average in both.

14. Overall and timely success rates on advanced apprenticeships are low. Overall success rates improved last year to just over 65% but remained below the

national average. Timely success rates are low on advanced apprenticeships, lagging the national average by almost 5%.

15. Overall and timely success rates on level 2 Train to Gain programmes and on Skills for Life programmes lag behind the national average in 2008/09 but show marked improvement to date in 2009/10.

16. In 2008/09 learners who have declared a learning difficulty/and or disability succeeded less well than those who did not. This has improved in 2009/10.

17. Learners feel safe and value the arrangements to ensuring their well-being. They are encouraged to eat healthy options within the training centre and are suitably informed of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The quality of provision   Grade 3

18. Quality of provision is satisfactory. Learners receive a satisfactory induction from the LDOs. Good use is made of progress reviews to revise topics covered during induction and to refresh and extend learners' knowledge and understanding. Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy competencies and learning styles is satisfactory; however, there is no initial assessment of learners' ICT skills. In engineering and manufacturing technologies, learners also complete an effective online occupational assessment to assess their vocational knowledge and aptitude.

19. In health, public services and care and teaching, training and assessment are good, while they are satisfactory in the other sector subject areas inspected. Integration of key skills into apprenticeship programmes is effective. Insufficient use is made of ILT to promote and support learning in all occupational areas. Many learners produce work, including portfolios and projects, which is of a good standard. Staff have appropriate occupational skills and expertise, which they use effectively to train learners. Progress reviews occur regularly and there is good involvement of employers in the review process. However, target setting is not a priority in engineering and manufacturing technologies reviews. Information, advice and guidance (IAG) are satisfactory overall. Currently, no tutor has a recognised IAG qualification.

20. Arrangements to provide additional literacy and numeracy support when required are good and satisfactorily meets the needs of learners and their employers. However, in Skills for Life, staff give insufficient priority to setting learning goals that can be used to measure individual progression and achievement.

21. Programmes successfully meet the needs and interests of learners and their employers. However, in business, administration and law, the range of programmes and additional learning opportunities is limited.

22. Alliance has developed very strong and highly beneficial partnerships with employers, schools, colleges and the local university. Over 300 apprentices

have made good use of a national initiative, which gives them the opportunity of becoming better acquainted with higher education and its advantages. The company is very well represented on local and national committees and working groups.

23. Support for learners is good. LDOs visit learners regularly in their workplaces to coach and assess them and to review their progress at convenient times for the learners and employers. Learners make good use of the opportunities they have for contacting LDOs by telephone, text and email when they require additional help. Many tutors deliver good pastoral support that effectively helps learners to overcome their difficulties and promotes their learning and development. In health and social care there are instances of support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities being excellent.

Leadership and management   Grade 3

24. Senior managers have developed a clear strategy for planning and development of the provision, although some key aspects are at an early stage. Strategic and business planning is careful and reflects regional and national priorities. A wide range of partnership working is effective and links with employers are good. Change is managed well at Alliance and operational management is good in most areas. Communications within the company are also good and staff support organisational objectives. Board members provide suitable challenge and support in their monitoring of strategy, business planning and financial management. However, they do not receive or request sufficiently detailed information on outcomes for learners.

25. Safeguarding is suitably prioritised throughout Alliance and is satisfactory. Learners feel safe and value the arrangements to ensuring their well-being. Alliance works proactively with local schools and with parents to identify and support vulnerable young people. All staff have received appropriate training on safeguarding. Key staff have undergone further training in safer recruitment. The provider meets all its legislative requirements. Suitable policies and procedures are in place and and these are reviewed annually but further work is needed to provide a consistent and more high profile approach to internet safety.

26. Alliance actively promotes equality and diversity. The company takes prompt and effective actions to deal with incidents of bullying and harassment. It follows up and records complaints appropriately. Recent progress has been made to review and develop current equality policies and procedures. An initiative to develop several staff as equality champions is well established but not fully implemented. The celebration of learners' success is good. Learners receive adequate equalities information, which LDOs reinforce effectively during their progress reviews. Monitoring of employers' and subcontractors' arrangements for equality and diversity is satisfactory. Staff have participated in recent equalities training, and training for board members is planned. Data for the current year indicates good progress to reduce gaps in achievement but managers do not routinely compare or report on the success of different groups

of learners other than by ethnicity. Alliance monitors the recruitment of learners from underrepresented groups, however, they do not use data to monitor trends; progress to increase recruitment from these groups is slow.

27.   The company has a satisfactory strategy to involve learners and employers in the arrangements for provision and responds well to suggestions for improvement. Monitoring of user engagement is well established through systematic surveys and sampling of views. However, attendance at both the learner and employer forums is low.

28.   Most processes to monitor and evaluate provision are satisfactory. The company has improved the use of management information to report on learners' achievement. Good use is made of monitoring systems to identify progress towards identified key targets and action to address issues raised is prompt. However, Alliance recognises that its performance management system and use of data at curriculum level need to be further developed.

29.   Self-assessment is satisfactory. Involvement of staff in the self-assessment process is good. Action plans for improvement are clear and most have realistic targets for improvement; progress monitoring is thorough. Arrangements to monitor subcontractors are satisfactory. However, as recognised in the self-assessment report, arrangements for observing teaching and learning are underdeveloped. The process is insufficiently rigorous and does not lead routinely to action plans for improvement or the sharing of good practice. The moderation process is not sufficiently robust.

30.   Alliance uses its resources efficiently and effectively to secure satisfactory value for money. Most current learners are making satisfactory progress. The company has successfully obtained additional funding to enhance provision. Well-maintained equipment meets industry standards. Induction of new staff is thorough and staff appraisal links appropriately to development. Staff have a good understanding of their roles and work effectively in their teams. The company has a firm commitment to sustainability, which it demonstrated in policies, planning of equipment purchases, and recycling arrangements.

Subject areas

Health, public services and care   Grade 2

Context

31.   There are 136 learners working towards qualifications in care, and early years
      care and education. Seventy-nine learners are on care programmes and 57 are
      on childcare and development courses. There are 57 advanced apprentices and
      69 apprentices. Of these, five are male. Ten learners are undertaking their NVQ
      through Train to Gain. Almost all learners are employed and work for private
      companies and local authorities in nurseries, schools, residential and nursing
      homes, home care agencies and supported living services.

Key findings

■   Outcomes for learners are good. In 2008/09, overall and timely success rates
    were high. Learners are making good progress overall and enjoy their learning.
    For many current learners, progress is good, although some are making slow
    progress. Most learners make good progress in developing new skills and
    knowledge, which improve their work and raise standards of care for service
    users. Progression to higher qualifications is good.

■   Learners develop good personal skills and increased confidence throughout their
    training. They discover useful methods for overcoming problems and learn new
    ways of understanding care needs. Learners have a good understanding of their
    rights and responsibilities. Their effectiveness improves and they become
    increasingly able to carry out their duties more efficiently.

■   Learners say they feel safe in their workplaces. They are reassured by, and
    make very good use of, the provider's safeguarding officer. Good attention is
    given to safe working practices and to health and safety guidance and
    procedures. Learners have a good understanding of the importance of safety
    and protection in health and social care and in childcare settings.

■   The quality of teaching, training and assessment is good. Staff use initial
    assessment effectively to plan learning and assessment, which ensures training
    is matched to the needs and interests of each learner. However, the provider
    does not use a specific sector skills assessment for initially assessing learners'
    vocational aptitudes. Portfolios are well organised and learners' work is of a
    good standard.

■   Promotion of equality and diversity is good. LDOs have a thorough and
    systematic approach to raising learners' awareness of difference and inequality.
    They discuss a wide variety of topics and issues with learners, all of which have
    a direct and important bearing on their work and personal life.

■   Partnerships with employers are good. Employers are effectively engaged in
    planning and reviewing learning. Staff ensure that employers' needs are met
    and that the training and development of learners has a positive impact on the
    standards of care and on learning and development in the workplace.

■   LDOs are very experienced and have good subject knowledge and sector skills. Learners look forward to meeting their LDO who design assessments effectively, making learning both interesting and worthwhile for learners and employers. They match coaching sessions well to the needs and interests of learners and employers.

■   All learners have a good awareness of their progress and understand what they have to do to complete their course successfully. They receive detailed and challenging targets, which LDOs review thoroughly. Success is well recognised and appropriately celebrated.

■   Learners receive good support from LDOs. This gives them considerable confidence and helps them to achieve their qualification. IAG are well organised and give learners an accurate and helpful overview of their options. There are instances of support for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities being excellent.

■   Resources to support learning are good. LDOs make very good use of employers' premises for delivering workshops. Training materials are of a good standard and used effectively by LDOs. However, key skills teaching resources do not relate to social care or childcare sufficiently.

■   Operational management of the health and social care provision is good. The focus on staff performance is also good and the whole team is highly motivated. Data are not used effectively to establish actions to narrow the achievement gap. The self-assessment process is broadly satisfactory but learners and employers are not sufficiently involved.

What does Alliance need to do to improve further?

■   Further improve timely success rates to ensure that learners who are making slow progress or facing barriers to learning increase their rate of progress and complete their qualification within the predicted time.

■   Introduce a sector skills assessment as part of the initial assessment and induction phase so that target setting and skills development are more sharply focused on individual learners' needs.

■   Improve the effectiveness of key skills teaching, activities, resources and support to ensure they meet the needs of learners in the care and childcare sectors more successfully.

■   Include learners and employers in the self-assessment process so that the views of all stakeholders inform the self-assessment report.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies   Grade 3

Context

32. Alliance offers a wide range of programmes in mechanical and electrical engineering. There are currently 228 learners, of which six are female. Twenty-one engineering staff deliver training and carry out assessments and internal verification. Alliance has established working partnerships with employers in Greater Manchester and Merseyside and with local schools. The company recruits learners mainly recruited through advertising, the Connexions service and directly from employers. Most learners are in employment. Apprentices and advanced apprentices attend the training centre on a day-release or block-release basis; Train to Gain learners undertake their training in the workplace.

Key findings

■ Overall success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are low when compared to national success rates. There has been a gradual improvement since 2006/07 and indicators suggest that provider success rates for 2009/10 will equal or exceed the national success rates. Train to Gain success rates are outstanding at 95%.

■ Learners are quickly developing high levels of manual and problem-solving skills, which they apply successfully in the workplace. They receive good training from the provider and develop good basic engineering skills prior to entry into work. However, some learners working towards level 2 qualifications show a poor understanding of some basic engineering concepts, such as projections and rudimentary drawing techniques.

■ The acquisition of engineering and manufacturing skills and qualifications significantly improves learners' future employment prospects. All learners interviewed demonstrated a good awareness of employers' rights and responsibilities. Learners feel safe in their learning environment and in some areas, such as hospitals, comply with stringent healthy and safe working practices.

■ Hazards and dangers are well signposted in workshop areas. All fire and portable equipment is tested and up-to-date. Material is stored in safe and well-ordered racking systems and risk-assessments are posted on machinery and around the workshop areas.

■ Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better sessions, tutors make good use of open and directed questions to check learning and employ visual aids well to reinforce the learning of engineering concepts. The weaker sessions are too teacher-centred and learning is insufficiently checked. The teaching staff have good vocational experience and are appropriately qualified.

■ Reviews are regular, thorough, and well structured. LDOs check learners' underpinning knowledge satisfactorily and make effective use of the internet for investigative work. However, target setting is insufficiently specific and

prioritised. The reinforcement of equality, diversity and safeguarding during reviews is insufficient and sometimes lacks depth.

■ Programmes are appropriately structured to meet employers' training requirements. All learners receive a comprehensive induction. They satisfactorily complete assessments to identify additional learning needs, learning styles and occupational aptitude. Portfolios are well structured, contain a range of diverse evidence and satisfactorily verified internally. They comply with awarding body requirements.

■ Operational management is satisfactory. Regular scheduled one-to-one meetings with staff are held to agree targets. The monitoring of these targets is underdeveloped. Staff have completed training in safeguarding within the last 12 months; their understanding of safeguarding procedures is satisfactory.

■ Working relationships with employers and training establishments are good. Employers train apprentices satisfactorily. Further education colleges are used well to provide technical certificate and key skills training. Alliance is actively involved with 14-19 initiatives in local schools; however, progression to apprenticeship programmes is low. In 2008/09 only 20% of school pupils who attended the centre joined apprenticeship programmes.

■ The use of management data at an operational level is ineffective. Staff do not have ready access to the management information system and show a poor understanding of its capabilities and operation for identifying and monitoring at-risk learners.

What does Alliance need to do to improve further?

■ Continue to raise apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship success rates so that all learners achieve their qualifications and complete their programme by the predicted end date.

■ Improve the standard of teaching and learning so that all learners experience high-quality teaching and learning and make good progress throughout their programme.

■ Improve progress reviews by setting clear targets in order of priority so that learners' knowledge of equality, diversity and safeguarding increases and they know what they have to do, and in which order.

■ Ensure that operational staff know how to use the management information system and how to interpret the data produced so that they can identify and monitor at-risk learners.

Business, administration and law   Grade 3

Context

33. Learners are working towards qualifications in administration and customer service. There are 50 learners, most of whom are working towards apprenticeships in administration. A small number of learners are adults. All learners work in small and medium-sized businesses located near to the provider.

Key findings

■ Overall, success rates are satisfactory. Learners' achievement improved steadily to 2008/09 when they exceeded national averages. Timely success rates also improved significantly over this period. In the current year, performance has dropped to below national average. Most current learners are progressing well and are likely to achieve on time.

■ Learners develop good workplace skills and knowledge through an effective combination of workplace training, coaching from LDOs and project work. Many learners have additional responsibilities in the workplace and make a valuable contribution to their organisations. Many learners progress to higher-level qualifications. Learners gain good levels of self-confidence and self-esteem and acquire a range of valuable transferable skills.

■ Learners feel safe in their workplaces and on training courses. They have an adequate understanding of health and safety. Trainers pay particular attention to this aspect during coaching sessions and reviews. Trainers promote health and safety effectively with employers.

■ Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learners acquire technical knowledge early in the programme giving them a good grasp of the key principles of administration and customer service. Resources, such as workshops and e-learning are insufficient to extend learning and provide additional qualifications.

■ Initial assessment and induction are adequate. There is very effective identification of learners' prior achievements. LDOs match programmes well to learners' work roles and engage employers effectively in early goal-setting. The provider is currently improving the induction processes, although staff development has not yet taken place. Learners receive effective support for key skills learning, sometimes with the involvement of specialist staff.

■ Assessment and monitoring of learners' progress is effective. Employers and learners have a very good understanding of progress towards agreed targets.

■ Trainers use progress reviews particularly well to summarise learners' progress and to engage employers in valuable discussions about learners' development needs. LDOs use reviews well to reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Trainers, employers and learners work well as a team to agree suitable action plans.

- Partnership working is satisfactory overall and particularly good with local employers. The provider has developed well-established links with local employers with whom it has a good reputation. Learners receive good support from their employers, many of whom provide specialist training.

- Trainers give particularly effective information and advice on progression routes to learners at all stages of their programme. Learners are successfully encouraged to pursue higher-level qualifications. They receive good personal support and find their trainers very helpful and approachable.

- Trainers are very committed to personal development. Managers place good emphasis on the performance of staff through closely monitored targets. The strategic management of programmes is not keeping pace with changes in the sector. Many planned changes are overdue and the impact on learners is particularly noticeable in relation to e-learning resources and additional courses.

- Strategies to promote administration and customer service programmes to men and other underrepresented groups are inadequate.

What does Alliance need to do to improve further?

- Continue to monitor overall and timely success rates to ensure that all learners successfully complete their programme by the expected end-date.

- Increase the range of resources, such as workshops and e-learning, to extend learning opportunities and opportunities for gaining additional qualifications.

- Improve the strategic management of programmes to ensure they keep pace with changes in the sector and implement planned changes ahead of, or by, the projected dates.

- Promote programmes to males and other underrepresented groups to increase their participation in administration and customer service courses and to challenge occupational stereotyping.

Preparation for life and work   Grade 3

Context

34. Fifty-nine learners receive additional support in literacy and numeracy. Of these 18 are engineering apprentices, 39 are care apprentices and two are administration apprentices. Staff also provide key skills training and assessments for engineering learners. They provide support on a one-to-one basis mainly in the workplace. Four staff work in this sector subject area.

Key findings

■ Overall success rates are satisfactory. Overall and timely success rates for apprentices with learning difficulties and/or disabilities show an improving trend over three years. In-year data shows significant improvements in success rates but these still lag behind the national average. Most additional learning support is provided to learners in the care sector, which has seen year-on-year improvements and success rates are now good.

■ Learners develop satisfactory skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. They demonstrate increased knowledge of literacy and numeracy and improved work-related communication skills. Many learners enjoy additional responsibility in the workplace because of improved numeracy skills. Portfolios contain a satisfactory range of evidence. Work is well presented, regularly marked and provides clear feedback to learners.

■ Learners feel safe. Training premises are appropriate. Environments in employers' premises are confidential. Learners demonstrate safe working practices when using the internet. Staff place good emphasis on the reinforcement of arrangements for safeguarding, equality and diversity and the provision of additional learning and pastoral support. Learners value their increased ability to work safely.

■ One-to-one coaching is effective and successfully meets learners' needs. Tutors are well prepared and they make effective use of visual aids. Coaching takes place regularly and in environments to suit learners. Resources are satisfactory but few are sector-specific.

■ Staff use individual learning plans insufficiently to plan and prioritise learning goals and to measure progress and achievement. Staff record activities carried out at each visit but they sometimes do not evaluate the learning that has taken place. They do not always reassess learners' skills frequently enough to motivate them effectively.

■ Initial diagnostic assessment of literacy and numeracy levels and of learning styles are satisfactory. In engineering, staff also assess learners' occupational aptitude. There is no initial assessment of learners' ICT knowledge and skills. Some learners would prefer paper-based rather than computerised assessment. Support to address needs identified at interview, does not usually begin until six weeks after initial referral.

- Provision is highly flexible to meet both learners' and employers' needs. Employers appreciate the flexibility of arrangements to provide support in the workplace. The range of provision is satisfactory. Staff completed a satisfactory pilot of functional skills before implementing in engineering. Some Skills for Life staff and engineering trainers have successfully gained functional skills qualifications.

- Alliance has extensive partnerships to promote learning and the inclusion of potential learners. Marketing staff are enthusiastically involved in a wide range of promotional activities with schools, training providers and community centres as part of wider events to encourage learning and to provide tasters and interview technique coaching to young people.

- Personal support for learners is satisfactory. Staff supporting learners with additional learning needs communicate effectively with LDOs. Staff use progress records satisfactorily to alert LDOs to potential support needs and reasons for non-attendance. Support arrangements are well defined. Induction satisfactorily provides awareness of equality and diversity, safeguarding and employment rights and responsibilities.

- Staff development is good. Staff are qualified to higher levels in subject specialist support qualifications. Staff training is wide-ranging and monthly supervision meetings provide an opportunity to regularly manage their performance. However, not all staff have been observed when teaching and managing learning.

- Data are insufficiently analysed and used to manage cohort attendance and referrals to support. Data systems do not allow for easy analysis of trends of performance. Staff do not routinely use data to analyse the performance of different groups and sectors.

What does Alliance need to do to improve further?

- Identify and prioritise learning goals on individual learning plans to improve the measurement and recording of learners' learning and progress.

- Initially assess learners' ICT competencies and their vocational aptitude to improve the accurate identification of their starting points.

- Reduce the waiting time for additional support so that those learners who need it receive it as quickly as possible.

- Continue to develop Skills for Life resources linked to engineering, care and administration to improve the relevance of literacy and numeracy to learners in these sectors.

- Rigorously analyse data to improve the management of referrals to support, and the monitoring of both cohort attendance and performance trends of different groups of learners.

Information about the inspection

35.   Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Operations Executive, as nominee, carried out the inspection.

Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the Skills Funding Agency, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

36.   Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Alliance Learning Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	409	409
Part-time learners	100	100
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3	
How well do learners progress?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*	3	
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*	n/a	
Quality of provision	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	3	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3	

*where applicable to the type of provision

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