

INSPECTION REPORT

Eclipse Training Limited

18 November 2002



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

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

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

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 training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** 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.

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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Eclipse Training Limited is a private training company which operates from premises in Irchester, Northamptonshire. The company has been operating since January 1999. It provides work-based learning for young people funded by the Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council. There are 30 learners following modern apprenticeships, of whom 22 are in business administration and eight are in retailing, customer service and transportation.

Overall judgement

The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in business administration is good. Training in retailing, customer service and transportation is satisfactory. The leadership and management and quality assurance are satisfactory, but the arrangements for equal opportunities are unsatisfactory.

GRADES

Leadership and management	3
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	3

Business administration, management & professional	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

KEY STRENGTHS

- good support for learners
- good internal verification practices
- good achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices

ECLIPSE TRAINING LIMITED

KEY WEAKNESSES

- insufficient emphasis on equal opportunities
- weak initial assessment

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of three inspectors spent a total of nine days at Eclipse Training Limited (ETL) in November 2002. They interviewed 23 learners, five of whom had achieved their training qualifications. They visited employers and interviewed 11 employers and workplace supervisors. They carried out seven interviews with ETL's staff and observed and graded one learning session. Inspectors examined a broad range of documents, including 12 portfolios of evidence, individual learning plans, the company's plans, policies and procedures and learners' records. They also examined the company's first self-assessment report which was produced in June 2002.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. ETL was established in 1999. It is based in Irchester in a small office in the managing director's house, which is used for administration only. Training, when it takes place, is normally carried out in the workplace using the employers' facilities. ETL currently offers training for modern apprentices in business administration and retailing, customer service and transportation. There are 22 learners in business administration and eight in retailing, customer service and transportation. All the learners are employed. There are two full-time members of staff, who are the managing director and the commercial director. ETL recruits learners throughout the Bedfordshire area. In May 2002, the unemployment rate in Bedfordshire and Luton was 2.4 per cent, compared with 3 per cent nationally. The service sector provides 71.5 per cent of employment in the area, production and construction 27.3 per cent and agriculture 1.2 per cent. The 1991 census shows that the proportion of people in the area from minority ethnic groups is 9.9 per cent, compared with 6.2 per cent nationally. The proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in 2001, was 46 per cent in Bedfordshire and Luton, compared with 47.9 per cent nationally.

Work-based learning for young people

3. Advanced modern apprentices in business administration make good progress towards completing the framework. There is slow progress for learners on the customer service programme. Few learners leave either programme early and achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are good in both areas. Business administration learners receive good support which is tailored to meet their individual needs. Customer service learners receive good pastoral support. There is a variety of good work placements for both areas. ETL has good relationships with the employers. Accreditation of prior learning and achievement for learners on the business administration programme is well managed. Initial assessment for learners on both programmes is poor. There is insufficient formal evaluation of training or co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

4. ETL offers foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships for young people funded through the Bedfordshire and Luton Learning and Skills Council (LSC). There are 30 learners, of whom 19 are women, none is from a minority ethnic group and none has identified additional learning or social needs. ETL has two full-time staff. All assessment is carried out by the provider. The management team consists of the managing director and the commercial director, who are also assessors, internal verifiers and trainers. Both directors share responsibility for management decisions and quality assurance. Assessors visit each learner approximately every four weeks, and in some cases more frequently. ETL has an equal opportunities policy, and policies and procedures for the quality assurance of training. The provider has previously contributed to a self-assessment report for a college, where it was a subcontractor. ETL's own first self-assessment report was produced in June 2002. The action plan was updated just before the inspection.

STRENGTHS

- good relationships with employers
- effective management information
- good internal verification practices

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient emphasis on equal opportunities
- insufficient formal evaluation of training

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of data analysis for decision making

5. ETL has good relationships with employers. Both directors are very familiar with the learners' job roles and working environments, and maintain good relationships with the learners' immediate supervisors and training and human resource departments. They relate the modern apprenticeship framework requirements with opportunities at work. Much of the recruitment comes from employers putting forward existing employees as modern apprentices. ETL's network of contacts with employers helps in the placement of potential learners who approach them direct.

6. The company has effective management information. The monitoring of reviews is effective and there are easy to read charts which ensure that the process is planned and carried out in a timely manner. Detailed information is kept on learners including the reasons for leaving. The company's information on retention and achievement rates is accurate. The clarity of the management information allows either director to access

data and use them as the basis for management decisions.

7. The company has a business plan which was produced in 1999 but has not been updated. However, it does state the aims and objectives of the company in broad terms. Both directors were involved in the formulation of the business plan and are committed to it. There are clear and specific corporate targets in the development plan which includes timescales and identified responsibilities. However, the staff are not given individual targets. Targets are discussed during a monthly review and actions and revised targets are set. Resources are used effectively and priorities such as the acquisition of software are supported through sound financial management.

8. Off-the-job training is organised in response to learners' individual needs or employers' requests. However, the training is limited to generic subjects such as information technology (IT) and time management. Other training takes place on the job and is monitored. Some employers are aware of the content of the off-the-job training, especially when they have requested it. All employers are given information on progress reviews and action plans, but most are not involved in the process. Both directors are very aware of what learners are doing in the workplace. Some learners who are making slow progress are given time to work on their qualifications at work. One learner's job did not cover some of the national vocational qualification (NVQ) units so she was moved to several different jobs in the company that provided the necessary opportunities.

9. As there are only two members of staff, there is no organisational structure, although both staff have clearly defined job descriptions. Both are occupationally competent and qualified assessors and internal verifiers. There is no staff appraisal system as it would not be appropriate for this organisation. There are training logs for both members of staff, but they do not have personal development plans. Training needs are identified and reflect existing and potential needs. Staff training is carried out externally and is informally evaluated by both members of staff.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

10. Learners have a satisfactory knowledge of equal opportunities and none of the learners expressed any concerns about equality of opportunity in the workplace. Both assessors have a sound knowledge of equal opportunities and they visit learners regularly and are very familiar with the learners and their employers. They respond appropriately and effectively to problems relating to equal opportunities and have stopped using an employer where learners did not feel comfortable. The provider has a satisfactory equal opportunities policy, but it was produced in February 2000 and has not been reviewed or updated since. The quality assurance manual does not have a procedure in place for reviewing the policy. There are no systems to ensure learners have sufficient knowledge or information about equal opportunities. There are no learners from minority ethnic groups and the provider does not set targets for recruitment. However, there have been learners from these groups in the past. ETL has not placed sufficient emphasis on equal opportunities and staff have not received any training and none is planned. ETL has no links with external agencies in the area. When new employers are approved, ETL asks if they have an equal opportunities policy, but it is not routinely checked. Employer agreements contain a single statement that all learners should be treated fairly. ETL makes no attempt to monitor employers' equal opportunity data or even establish if employers are collecting data. Equality of opportunity is discussed briefly at induction, but learners have little recall of it. It is also discussed briefly during progress reviews, but again learners have little recall of the discussion. ETL has identified that there is insufficient focus on equal opportunities during progress reviews and recently introduced a questionnaire to increase learners' awareness.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 3

11. The internal verification practice at ETL is good. Both members of staff are qualified assessors and internal verifiers and each acts as internal verifier for the other. The company has previously employed freelance assessors but this proved to be ineffective. In recognition of the size of the company and the potential lack of objectivity from each member of staff internally verifying the assessments of the other, the provider has purchased additional visits and advice from the external verifier.

12. ETL is not making best use of data analysis in its decision-making. Data are collected but there is little analysis other than for contract compliance. Decision-making tends to be in direct response to an individual learner or employer. Some performance data are systematically collected and analysed for management decisions. For example, the provider analysed the work-placement information and then employed a telemarketing firm to target companies who could offer similar work placements to those which had been most successful in the past. Although data are collected and analysed each year through learner and employer questionnaires, the organisation does not use the data to identify trends. The data from the questionnaires are used to monitor the quality of the provision for that year. The directors oversee strategic direction and monitor the quality of provision through the internal verification process and through the annual questionnaires. The company's data on the number of starts, and retention and achievement rates are accurate and current.

13. There is insufficient formal evaluation of training. The provider has few records of the employers' training but some informal evaluation takes place when the directors observe each other. However, the observations are not graded. The provider does not discuss the training with all employers and there is little co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Some employers are very interested in their employees' progress and ensure that suitable learning and assessment opportunities are provided to help them progress through the NVQ units.

14. The self-assessment report dealt with each of the questions in the 'Common Inspection Framework', and it detailed sources of evidence for the judgements. Some of the strengths identified were considered to be no more than normal practice. There were only two weaknesses in the report, both of which had been resolved before the inspection. Inspectors identified strengths and weaknesses which were not included in the self-assessment report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	22	2

15. ETL offers a modern apprenticeship programme in administration and there are 22 learners working towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3. Sixteen are advanced modern apprentices and six are foundation modern apprentices. Many learners are recruited from employers, and some are recruited by ETL, which arranges job interviews with potential employers. ETL has developed a network of employers in Bedfordshire and Luton which includes local, national and international companies. All learners are employed. There are two assessors who also train the learners. Assessors visit learners in the workplace every three to four weeks. Progress reviews take place at least every three months.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	2		17		18		4		9						
Retained*	0		0		11		3	75	7	78						
Successfully completed	0		0		11		3	75	7	78						
Still in learning	2		13		1		0	0	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	5		4		5		4		6						
Retained*	0		0		2		0	0	5	83						
Successfully completed	0		0		2		0	0	5	83						
Still in learning	4		1		1		0	0	0	0						

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

STRENGTHS

- good achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices
- good support tailored to individual needs
- well-managed accreditation of prior achievement

WEAKNESSES

- poor initial assessment

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more information to employers on learners' progress
- better induction

16. There are some good achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices. Between 1998-99 and 1999-2000, the average achievement rate for advanced modern apprentices was 76.5 per cent. In 2000-01, 18 advanced modern apprentices joined the programme and 61 per cent have achieved the qualification, and one learner is still in learning. The achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices are not as good. Many advanced modern apprentices and foundation modern apprentices make good progress. Advanced modern apprentices usually achieve their qualifications in just over a year, while foundation modern apprentices achieve in just under a year.

17. Assessors usually visit the workplace every three or four weeks and learners are also able to contact them between assessment visits by telephone and e-mail. Requests for support are responded to quickly. Assessors are very responsive to the individual needs of learners. For example, they have successfully negotiated with an employer to allow study time in working hours to enhance the progress of a learner who could not study at home. The coaching by assessors is appropriate to the learning styles of individual learners and meets the needs of learners who need additional support. The assessors also offer good pastoral support. One learner identified during a review that they did not feel at ease with their assessor. The company consulted the learner on a change of assessor and it took effect on the same day. Assessors give effective support to learners who experience difficulties at work, such as poor attendance. They also provide practical assistance by offering transport to job interviews.

18. Both assessors are qualified to assess the accreditation of prior achievement. The company systematically identifies and records learners' existing qualifications and achievements in order to reduce the amount of NVQ and key skills evidence required. If assessors are unsure whether the prior evidence is appropriate, they seek advice and

guidance from the external verifier and awarding bodies.

19. The company does not use recognised basic skills assessments to identify learners' basic skills needs. The assessment they use is inappropriate as it is designed to compare learners with a group of people who have two GCSEs at grade C or above. Two of the three sections of the assessment test reasoning ability rather than basic skills competence. The third section requires a paragraph of text to be written, but it does not have any criteria for marking or interpretation. Neither of the assessors who carry out these tests are qualified in basic skills.

20. Most employers are aware of the learners' progress and are satisfied with the information they are given by the provider. However, some state they are not informed of their learners' progress on the NVQ, nor are they told about any training given by ETL.

21. Induction is satisfactory but some learners feel that there is too much information for one session. It is not memorable and there is little attention paid to equal opportunities.

Good Practice

Learners and managers from a company attended two introductory events to a new programme organised by the provider. They developed a common understanding of the structure of NVQs and the assessment process and learners were able to develop an effective peer support network.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	8	3

22. ETL has eight learners working towards customer service NVQs at levels 2 and 3, all of whom are employed. There are two foundation modern apprentices and six advanced modern apprentices. Assessors visit learners approximately every four weeks to produce assessment plans, carry out observations and identify tasks for the next visit. Tasks identified at the previous visit are also checked for relevance and accuracy. There are two qualified assessors who are also qualified internal verifiers. Assessors also carry out the progress reviews every 12 weeks. Assessors are occupationally competent. Training takes place in the workplace.

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts			6		16		5		9						
Retained*			0		8		3	60	6	67						
Successfully completed			0		8		3	60	6	67						
Still in learning			4		2		0	0	0	0						

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

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	1		2												
Retained*	0		0													
Successfully completed	0		0													
Still in learning	1		1													

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

STRENGTHS

- good pastoral support
- good work placements
- good achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices

WEAKNESSES

- weak initial assessment
- slow progress towards achievement of qualifications

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better layout of portfolios
- more employer involvement in progress reviews
- greater detail in induction paperwork
- more structured training plans
- more explicit contact details on appeals procedure

23. Learners are given good pastoral support by their assessor. They are routinely visited every three to four weeks, but this can be more often if required. Some learners were made redundant and the assessor visited them each week to help them achieve their qualification before they left. ETL also tries to find new jobs for learners if they have been made redundant or they are unhappy in their present employment. If learners change their jobs, ETL makes every effort to continue the training with the new employer. Assessors also visit learners at home, such as those on maternity leave, if this is more convenient. Learners value the support they are given by their assessors.

24. Most learners are in businesses which are committed to training and many of which have been accredited with the Investors in People standard. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people. These businesses encourage their staff to be involved in a modern apprenticeship programme and give them time at work to collect evidence. Learners are working in busy, modern offices, using good equipment and resources.

25. Achievement rates for advanced modern apprentices are good. The numbers of learners on this programme have been relatively small, but achievement rates have been above 60 per cent in the two years to 2000. Retention rates are satisfactory during this period. It is not possible to make a judgement on the achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices as there have only been three learners on this programme.

26. Initial assessment is weak. All learners carry out an initial assessment of key skills when they start and it is usually marked straight away and the learner is given the result. However, the assessment is not sufficient to identify gaps in the learners' knowledge particularly in application of number. There is no initial assessment of IT. The results of the assessment are not used to identify which apprenticeship programme is appropriate for the learners. One learner performed particularly badly on the numeracy section but was still put on an advanced modern apprenticeship. Another performed very well on the numeracy assessment but was put on a foundation modern apprenticeship programme. There is no attempt to individualise the level of key skills as a result of the initial assessment. There is no assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills.

27. Learners make slow progress towards the achievement of their qualification. Learners usually take about six to nine months to complete any units. Learners start collecting evidence at the beginning of their programme but the evidence is not cross-referenced to the key skills. Learners are usually working on several units at the same time and opportunities for collecting evidence are not taken as the learners are unaware of their progress. There is no emphasis on completing individual units to help motivation. All learners have a copy of their individual learning plan, and details of qualifications are listed with target dates. However, the assessor does not refer to the learners' copy of the plan when reviewing their progress. A summary document is used to monitor when units are started and completed, but it does not have target achievement dates. During the regular visits, assessors agree an action plan with details of work to be completed before the next visit, but the tasks are frequently not demanding enough. Assessment practices are satisfactory and a variety of evidence is collected by learners. Progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on learners' progress towards the achievement of their qualifications.

28. Portfolios of evidence are satisfactory. However, they are not well organised and learners find it difficult to see where each section starts.

29. Employers are kept informed of the content of their learners' reviews, but are not always directly involved in the review process. Opportunities are not taken for employers to be involved in the professional development of learners.

30. Induction paperwork is satisfactory. Induction is usually carried out on an individual basis in the workplace and can take place over a period of time. Learners are given an induction booklet which is discussed with the assessor. However, the details in the booklet are very brief and do not include sufficient information.

31. The planning of training is satisfactory. Learners are offered a variety of training opportunities usually on an individual basis in the workplace. Assessors know their learners and their workplaces well and the training is usually carried out on an informal basis.

32. All learners have a copy of the NVQ appeals procedure which identifies the job title

of the people learners can contact, but does not give names or telephone numbers. Learners who have been training for some time know who to contact and have access to their telephone numbers, but the details are not listed on the document. New learners do not know who to contact if they need to appeal against an assessment decision.