

REINSPECTION REPORT

Action For Employment Limited Reinspection

12 May 2004



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

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

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes 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.

REINSPECTION REPORT

Action For Employment Limited Reinspection

Contents

Description of the provider	1
Scope of provision	1
About the reinspection	2
Overall judgement	2
Grades	2
Construction	5
Health, social care & public services	8

REINSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Action for Employment Limited (A4e) is a national company which specialises in providing employment, training and welfare support for unemployed people. It also offers a range of support services for businesses. A4e Work is the division of A4e responsible for training provision funded by Jobcentre Plus and the local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs). It provides work-based learning programmes from 65 offices nationally.
2. A4e has its headquarters in Sheffield and divides its operations into the three regions of the North, the South and Yorkshire, Humber and the Midlands. Each region is managed by an operational director who reports to A4e's chief executive officer. Each office has a business manager, whose primary responsibility is to provide services for local customers and clients. Regional support teams work with the business managers and comprise regional managers, regional support managers, regional training managers and regional quality managers.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Construction

3. A4e provides training in construction for 152 New Deal clients, 144 of whom are men. Fifty-six clients are on New Deal 18-24, and 96 are on New Deal 25+. All are following the environment task force or full-time education and training options. Clients work towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 1, or an intermediate construction award accredited by a national industry training board, in painting and decorating, brickwork, carpentry and joinery or general construction. Most clients are on a 26-week programme and are working towards five units of the NVQ or four units of the intermediate construction award at level 2. Clients on a 13-week programme work towards three NVQ units. All clients complete an initial assessment followed by an induction programme. Support is provided to meet any additional needs identified at initial assessment as requiring support. All clients complete an individual learning plan. Some clients receive all of their training through community projects supervised by A4e or through subcontractors, while others learn at area training centres and through on-the-job work experience. Assessors visit clients in the workplace at least every two weeks to carry out progress reviews and assessment. All clients carry out jobsearch activities for half a day each week.

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

Health, social care & public services

4. Two hundred and sixty-six learners are following programmes in health, social care and public services. Of these, 108 are on foundation modern apprenticeships, 16 are on advanced modern apprenticeships and three are studying for an NVQ only. Sixty-six are New Deal 18-24 clients and 73 are New Deal 25+ clients. Learners on modern apprenticeships are employed, and Jobcentre Plus clients are on placements in nurseries, schools, hospitals, and nursing and residential homes. Most of the NVQ and key skills training and assessment is carried out in the workplace by A4e's assessors and key skills tutors. Training in health and safety, food hygiene and manual handling is offered at centres or in workplaces around the country. Progress reviews are carried out during assessors' visits, and health and safety is checked every eight weeks.

ABOUT THE REINSPECTION

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	21
Number of learner interviews	38
Number of staff interviews	21
Number of employer interviews	13
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	8

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

5. At the previous inspection of July 2002, all aspects of provision were found to be satisfactory or better apart from provision in construction, and health, social care and public services, which was unsatisfactory. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision reinspected were found to be good.

GRADES

Grades awarded at previous inspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Land-based provision	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

Construction	4
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3
New Deal 18-24	3
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

Business administration, management & professional	2
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2
New Deal 18-24	2
Work-based learning for young people	4

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3
Work-based learning for young people	3

Retailing, customer service & transportation	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	2
Work-based learning for young people	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	3
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	3
Work-based learning for young people	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3

Health, social care & public services	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3
New Deal 18-24	3

Foundation programmes	2
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 18-24	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	3
Programme centres	2
Life Skills	3

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

Grades awarded at reinspection

grade 1= outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Construction	2
Contributory grades:	
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2
New Deal 18-24	2

Health, social care & public services	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	2
New Deal 18-24	2

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	96	2
New Deal 18-24	56	2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good achievement of additional qualifications
- good training
- good learning and practical support

Weaknesses

- inadequate progress reviews
- insufficient use of data by assessors and supervisors

Achievement and standards

6. Clients' achievement of additional qualifications continues to be good, having been identified as a strength in the previous inspection. Clients achieve qualifications in health and safety, first aid, lift truck operation and the use of power tools. These qualifications enhance clients' employability and increase their motivation to succeed. Clients work well towards their intended qualification and many have achieved accreditation for one or two NVQ or intermediate construction award units. Most clients produce portfolios of a satisfactory standard which contain diverse evidence.

7. Retention and achievement rates are now satisfactory. Achievement rates have improved from 17 per cent in 2001-02 to 40 per cent in 2002-03. In the same period, rates of retention and progression into jobs for New Deal 18-24 clients were 38 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. Retention rates for New Deal 25+ clients improved from 55 per cent to 64 per cent in this period.

Quality of education and training

8. Clients receive good training. The previous inspection recognised off-the-job training as good. Well-qualified and vocationally experienced trainers and workplace supervisors use good training techniques. Most training is practical, with the related background knowledge learnt on site or in the training centres. Some clients work on community projects, which provide a realistic working environment. Clients carry out a range of

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

tasks that enhance their practical skills, and are able to practise and repeat the work if necessary. They are fully involved in the training programme from start to completion, and are provided with work placements or community project placements within two weeks of starting training. Clients' progress in work placements was identified as slow at the previous inspection. Clients are now quickly introduced to work-related tasks and progress well in developing good practical skills.

9. Clients receive good learning and practical support, as was identified at the previous inspection. Vocational trainers and workplace supervisors provide good support to help clients achieve their qualification. Assessors visit the clients in the workplace at least every two weeks, and more frequently if required. Progress reviews are carried out every four weeks and assessment every two weeks. A qualified trainer visits clients on community programmes to provide training and background knowledge. Employers are also involved in the training process. Clients say that they appreciate this close involvement by all the people concerned in the training programme, and that it helps to motivate them to succeed. Jobsearch trainers provide clients with a wide range of training in life skills as well as employability skills. Specialist staff provide additional learning support for those clients identified at initial assessment as needing it. Clients are also provided with effective support on presentation and interview techniques, and some are given financial support so they can buy specialist tools and equipment before they begin their work placement.

10. Resources are satisfactory on and off the job. Training centres, community projects and employers' premises have satisfactory tools and equipment to enable clients to practise the tasks and skills required for their qualification. Learning resource rooms in area training premises are adequately resourced with computers, which all clients have access to.

11. Assessment and internal verification are satisfactory. Most assessment is carried out by observation in the workplace by qualified assessors. Assessment and verification are formative and cover all aspects of clients' work. The internal verifier now visits the various area offices in person, and carries out verification of the assessor, the assessment process and clients' portfolios. At the previous inspection the internal verifier only verified portfolios posted to the head office in Sheffield.

12. Individual learning plans were identified as inaccurate and incomplete at the previous inspection. This weakness has been satisfactorily rectified. Individual learning plans now clearly identify the units that clients are working towards. Achievement target dates are set for each client. Plans are updated at regular intervals to include unit accreditation and any additional qualifications achieved. All clients are aware of their qualification aims.

13. A4e's provision of literacy, numeracy, and language skills support is satisfactory. Clients' additional support needs are identified at initial assessment. Support is provided each week by specialist subject tutors in the area training centres.

14. The range of construction programmes offered by A4e is satisfactory. Clients work

in carpentry and joinery, brickwork, painting and decorating and general construction, and have access to a range of programmes and appropriate qualifications. Progression routes to work-based learning modern apprenticeships are available. The programmes offered are planned and managed satisfactorily, meet the needs of clients and employers and are socially inclusive. In addition, A4e has designed and managed some projects that meet the needs of local community groups. These projects include interior and exterior decorating of a local youth hostel and church premises.

15. Clients' progress reviews remain inadequate, having been identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. A single document is used to record assessment activities and progress reviews. Clients and managers are often confused as to what a review is, and what an assessment record is. Many reviews are incomplete and do not adequately record the training that takes place. In many cases, targets are not realistic, achievable or measurable. Statements made are often repetitive and bland. While some reviewers may discuss equality of opportunity, these topics are not sufficiently reinforced or recorded. The review document has no designated space in which to record clients' comments.

Leadership and management

16. Leaders and managers set a clear direction for staff. A4e has worked well to rectify the problems identified at the previous inspection. The self-assessment report accurately identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses found during the reinspection. Inspectors gave the area of learning a better grade than A4e gave itself.

17. Trainers, assessors and workplace supervisors make insufficient use of data at local level. Data are collected, analysed and used by senior managers, but are not routinely provided to, or systematically used by, training staff to identify trends, set targets or promote continuous improvement. Many staff at local training offices are unaware of clients' rates of achievement or progression into jobs. Managers at head office have identified this weakness and have taken actions to rectify it. These actions are not fully developed yet and it is too early to judge their effectiveness.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	127	2
New Deal 25+ and work-based learning for adults	73	2
New Deal 18-24	66	2

During the reinspection process, the inspectors identified the following strengths and weaknesses:

Strengths

- good learning and pastoral support
- comprehensive initial assessment
- particularly good integration of key skills and vocational training

Weaknesses

- insufficient long-term target-setting

Achievement and standards

18. Retention is satisfactory, and improving. For New Deal 25+ clients it was 57 per cent in 2001-02 and for New Deal 18-24 clients it was 39 per cent. Of those clients who started these programmes in 2003-04, 75 per cent are still in learning. Retention **and achievement rates** for modern apprentices **have improved and are now** satisfactory.

19. Achievement of targets on individual learning plans was identified as a weakness during the previous inspection. Achievement rates on work-based learning for adults and New Deal 25+ programmes are now satisfactory. Some learners make slow progress, with 20 starters from 2000-01 still in learning. The rate of NVQ unit achievement on New Deal 18-24 programmes is poor, but has improved from 10 per cent at the previous inspection to a current 19 per cent. Rates of progress into employment, at 42 per cent, exceed the target set by Jobcentre Plus. A4e has put in place effective strategies to monitor progress and rectify concerns. Staff use a spreadsheet to identify and monitor learners' progress towards their NVQ. Monthly meetings between managers and assessors identify any problems and take steps to resolve them. The standard of work in portfolios is satisfactory, as are learners' competence levels.

Quality of education and training

20. Learners receive good pastoral and learning support. This strength was not identified at the previous inspection. Assessors are allocated to specific workplaces and visit learners frequently in the workplace. Learners receive visits at least once a month, often every two weeks and sometimes more frequently. Assessors arrange visits flexibly,

for early mornings, evenings and weekends, to take account of shift patterns. Home visits are made where appropriate. On every visit, the assessor agrees an assessment plan with the learner. Copies are given to the employer, who is invited to sign and make comments. Learners are very clear about what they need to do, and are progressing satisfactorily through the units. Assessors give good individual support to learners. Appropriate learning resources are available. Learners buy an approved textbook, and have access to learning packs for each unit. Learners with additional needs receive good support. They are also tested for dyslexia where appropriate, and provided with support equipment if they need it. Portable dictation machines are available. One learner with a hearing impairment has been allocated an assessor who has had basic training in the use of sign language. If learners have personal or social problems, A4e guides them to the appropriate external agencies through its specialist support service.

21. Initial assessment is particularly comprehensive, as identified at the previous inspection. All learners receive a thorough assessment of their understanding of the occupational area, their skills and their learning needs. They take written tests to assess their literacy and numeracy skills. Staff identify, and work well to meet, learners preferred learning styles. Key skills are assessed online. Learners' professional and personal skills are analysed. The results are carefully recorded on learners' individual learning plans and used to identify and meet their individual needs. Basic skills staff make good additional support and advice available in the centres.

22. Key skills training are integrated particularly well with vocational training. The assessors and learners receive effective support from the key skills tutor, who accompanies the assessor on visits to learners in the workplace. This provides the assessor with an insight into the requirements of key skills, and gives the key skills tutor an insight into the NVQ. This integrated approach gives learners a good understanding of how key skills training and assessment fit in with their main programme and help them make good progress. Written tasks are carefully related to topics in care or childcare, and meet the requirements of the appropriate key skills units. Learners are provided with a laptop in the workplace to produce key skills work. The key skills tutor gives good additional individual support to any learners who need it.

23. Support for literacy, numeracy and language skills is satisfactory. The basic skills tutor supports assessors in identifying strategies for supporting individual learning. Assessors give extra support to enable learners to progress with their NVQ. Available resources include portable dictation machines, laptops for learners who have difficulty with written work, and coloured worksheets for learners with dyslexia. However, not all learners receive specific support to overcome their literacy or numeracy difficulties.

24. Resources are satisfactory. Staff members have a good mix of skills and adequate learning resources are provided, but they have not yet been updated to take account of the technical certificates. New textbooks, which cover the requirements of the technical certificates, have been purchased for assessors. Assessors meet every month to share good practice and agree best methods of teaching and assessment practice.

25. Assessment practice and internal verification are satisfactory. Learners are regularly

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

observed in the workplace, and assessors keep detailed observation records. Most portfolios contain an appropriate range of evidence, but some, particularly at level 2, base too much of the knowledge evidence on answers to questions and include insufficient evaluation by learners of their own practice. Portfolios are organised well and adequately referenced. A4e has an appropriate internal verification strategy and provides satisfactory feedback to assessors, but some portfolios are not internally verified promptly enough. Staff hold effective standardisation meetings. The sampling documentation is currently being redesigned to make it easier to identify which units have been verified.

26. The range of programmes offered is sufficient to meet learners' needs. Learners have the opportunity to take part in courses offered through the workplace in addition to their main qualification.

27. Insufficient long-term target-setting takes place in progress reviews. The assessment plan and review are carried out using the same format, which is effective for short-term planning. However, this format does not allow for long-term review of learners' progress, and when they will achieve particular units or the whole qualification. The review format does not consider equality of opportunity explicitly enough and does not always include employers' comments. The eight-weekly review only covers health and safety and does not provide an adequate longer-term review of progress in achieving the whole framework. Some individual learning plans do not have target dates for individual units. Some learners are making slow progress.

Leadership and management

28. A4e's management of training is now satisfactory, having been identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. A4e's staff have worked hard to ensure that learners receive appropriate training. Assessors provide good individual coaching, and keep employers informed about training. Some centres provide training for moving and handling objects, first aid, food hygiene and child protection, but some do not. Some learners receive this training in the workplace, and include copies of the certificates they receive in their portfolios as evidence. A4e has developed an effective form for planning and recording on- and off-the-job training, but this is not currently being used effectively. Implementation of technical certificates has been slow. Accreditation for delivery was delayed and some confusion arose over the requirements of the local LSC and the Sector Skills Council. Work on technical certificates is now progressing well. Learning session plans and resources are being developed and learners identified as ready have been entered for the technical certificate examination in the summer. They are being supported to prepare for the examinations.

29. A4e provides appropriate opportunities for staff development. New staff receive a comprehensive induction and are supported well. All assessors are required to complete the key skills qualification at level 2, and staff are encouraged to take the technical certificate examination to ensure that they understand the requirements and are better able to support the learners. All staff are committed to improvement and have been fully involved in A4e's development plan. Communication within the company, and with

ACTION FOR EMPLOYMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

employers, is open. A4e's self-assessment report accurately identifies many of the strengths and weaknesses found by the inspectors. However, the company was too self-critical in giving itself a worse grade in its self-assessment than that given by the inspectors.