

eti

*The Education and Training Inspectorate -
Promoting Improvement*

**Providing Inspection Services for
Department of Education
Department for Employment and Learning
Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure**



Education and Training Inspectorate

Report of a Follow-up Inspection

following an

Inspection of the ApprenticeshipsNI provision in

A4e

January 2015

FOLLOW-UP TO THE INSPECTION OF A4E

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the overall quality of the training provided by A4e was inadequate; the inspection identified significant areas for improvement to be addressed in the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. These included:

- the strategic leadership and management of the provision;
- the processes for self-evaluation and quality improvement planning, including the collation, analysis and interpretation of up-to-date, reliable and accurate data;
- the curricular leadership, including more effective integration of the development of the apprentices' essential skills within their vocational learning;
- the rigour and appropriateness of the pre-entry guidance for apprentices and the purpose and effectiveness of their personal training plans; and
- the quality and consistency of the teaching, training and learning, with a particular focus on extending and enhancing the apprentices' technical knowledge and occupational skills.

The original inspection also identified important areas for improvement to be addressed in the professional and technical areas of: business and administration; customer service and retail; essential skills; food and drink manufacturing; hospitality and catering and warehousing.

The first improvement plan submitted by A4e lacked sufficient detail on how some of the key areas for improvement identified in the original inspection were to be addressed. Subsequently, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) scrutinised a revised improvement plan submitted by A4e and evaluated it to be of adequate quality.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of A4e have taken place:

- in January 2014, approval was obtained from the Department for Employment and Learning (Department) to end its contract to deliver the ApprenticeshipsNI programme by the end of March 2015;
- the completion of an extensive audit and review of the provision, which contributed to an increase in the number of apprentices leaving their training programme early, particularly those who were not engaging fully with the training;
- a significant reduction in the number of apprentices recruited, leading to the termination of some sub-contracting arrangements;
- a significant reduction in the management and staffing complement of the organisation, aligned to the declining apprentice registration levels;
- the deployment of a transition manager from the parent company to oversee the cessation of the apprenticeship training contract; and
- the implementation of regular case-conferencing and quality assurance procedures to track, monitor and review the progress of each apprentice.

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out two interim follow-up visits in November 2013 and September 2014, and a follow-up inspection in January 2015.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the better use of data to track, monitor and review the progress of each apprentice;
- the quality of the apprentices' personal training plans which are now used more effectively to record their progress and achievements;
- the more effective use of the internal quality assurance procedures to improve the standard of the apprentices' work; and
- the increased rigour in the co-ordination of the provision to ensure that most of the remaining apprentices are on target to achieve their full framework by the end of March 2015.

The areas which require further development are:

- the continued negotiation with the apprentices and their employers to ensure that all of the remaining apprentices successfully achieve their full framework, particularly for the small number who have been identified at risk of not completing successfully their training qualifications;
- the quality of the careers education, information, advice and guidance provision to ensure that all of the apprentices are made fully aware of possible progression opportunities;
- the satisfactory retention rate, which has not improved since the original inspection; and
- the articulation of a clearer strategic plan to support the cessation of the contract, including any associated administration functions, to ensure the needs of all the remaining apprentices are met.

Conclusion

Overall, the quality of training provided by A4e is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement remain to be addressed if the needs of all of the apprentices are to be met effectively. It will be important that the organisation continues to work closely with the Department to ensure a coherent exit strategy is in place and that no apprentices are disadvantaged.

PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL AREAS

Business and Administration

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in business and administration was satisfactory. By the time of the follow-up inspection, only three apprentices remained on the ApprenticeshipsNI programme. The tutor has worked very hard and to good effect to ensure that the apprentices are supported and encouraged to achieve the full framework qualification. The tracking and monitoring of the apprentices' progress has improved. The standard of work in the portfolios of evidence remains good. The rate of retention for the apprentices recruited in 2012/13, however, is too low. Overall, in business and administration the quality of the training remains satisfactory.

Warehousing and Storage

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in warehousing and storage was satisfactory. By the time of the follow-up inspection, only four apprentices remained on the programme. Management and staff have communicated well with the apprentices and their employers to ensure appropriate arrangements are in place for the apprentices to complete their training by the end of March 2015. The majority (68%) of the apprentices have remained on programme, and almost all (94%) of those who remain achieve the full framework. A small number of the remaining apprentices, however, are making slow progress in completing their training and are at risk of not achieving the full framework. Overall, progress in addressing the areas for improvement identified at the original inspection has been slow and, as a consequence, the quality of the training in this area remains satisfactory.

Customer Service and Retail

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in customer service and retail was inadequate; the inspection identified significant areas for improvement to be addressed in the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. These included:

- the use of management information to track the progress of apprentices, and to identify and implement appropriate strategies to support those apprentices at risk of not meeting their full potential;
- the quality of the personal training plans, which did not record sufficiently the prior levels of educational attainment, current work roles and development needs of the apprentices;
- the engagement of the employers to support apprentices in their learning; and
- the effectiveness of contingency planning to cover staff absences, and for management to take urgent action to support those apprentices who had significant gaps in their training.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- the significant reduction in the total number of apprentices registered in customer service and in retail, from 420 apprentices to only 18; and

- the high levels of staff turnover which resulted in significantly disruptive changes in the deployment of tutors to provide training.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the more effective use of management information to monitor the progress of the apprentices in the vocational training and in the essential skills;
- the quality of the apprentices' personal training plans, which now record more effectively their prior achievements and development needs;
- the progression of most of the remaining apprentices, albeit after a lengthy period on their training programmes, most of whom are now on target to achieve their full framework by the end of March 2015; and
- the more manageable case load for the essential skills and professional and technical tutors, enabling them to support better the apprentices in their learning and assessment.

The areas which require further development are:

- to provide relevant support for the small number of the apprentices who still have significant gaps in their training programmes;
- more effective employer engagement to support all of the apprentices in their training;
- to provide more coherent advice and guidance to the apprentices on the progression pathways available to them when they complete their training; and
- the satisfactory retention rates (64%) on the level 2 and level 3 apprenticeship programmes for both professional and technical areas.

Conclusion

In customer service and in retail, the quality of training provided by A4e is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement remain to be addressed if the needs of all the apprentices are to be met effectively.

Essential Skills

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in the essential skills was satisfactory; the inspection identified important areas for improvement to be addressed in the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. These included:

- the strategic and curricular leadership and management of the provision which lacked cohesive planning, tracking and monitoring;

- the further development of opportunities for collaboration between the professional and technical tutors and the essential skills tutors to improve standards in literacy and numeracy and to ensure the transferability of the essential skills;
- the further development of a wider range of teaching, training and learning strategies to develop and embed literacy and numeracy skills beyond the requirements of formal assessment; and
- the gathering, collation and interrogation of key data to inform more effectively the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes.

In the interval since the original inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- an extensive audit and review of the apprentices' progress resulting in revised scheduling and training arrangements for the delivery of the essential skills;
- an appropriate investment in retaining three essential skills tutors during a period of staffing changes and redundancies; and
- the improved systems and processes for tracking and reviewing the apprentices' progress and achievements in the essential skills.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the improved access to the essential skills provision for those apprentices who require training; and
- the improved operational management and delivery arrangements across the provision.

The areas which require further development are:

- the continued collaboration between the professional and technical tutors and the essential skills tutors to enhance the apprentices' capabilities to transfer and to embed the essential skills beyond the requirements of formal assessment; and
- the collation and interrogation of key data at strategic level to inform an effective action plan to complete all aspects of the provision, including formal certification of achievements, within the remaining timescale.

Conclusion

In the essential skills, the quality of training provided by A4e remains satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement remain to be addressed if the needs of all the apprentices are to be met effectively.

Food and Drink Manufacturing

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in food and drink manufacturing was satisfactory; the inspection identified important areas for improvement to be addressed in the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. These included:

- the insufficient staffing levels, limited development of pedagogy, and a narrow range of learning resources to support the delivery of the programme;
- the underdeveloped monitoring and progress tracking systems to inform quality improvement planning and to inform the apprentices of their progress through their personal training plans;
- the undue variation in the quality of the apprentices written work in their portfolios and the limited development of their essential skills within their professional and technical training; and
- the limited involvement of sub-contractors in the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes, including the sharing of good practice across the provision.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- recruitment to this professional and technical area ceased in February 2014;
- an action plan was implemented to complete training for all apprentices remaining on programme, by the end of March 2015;
- in July 2014, a new tutor was assigned to provide the training and assessment in this area; and
- a revised tracking system was implemented to monitor more comprehensively the progress of each apprentice.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the much improved quality of the directed training and support provided by the highly committed and competent tutors;
- the quality of the apprentices' written work presented in their assessment portfolios is now mostly good or better, including a greater level of consistency across the portfolios;
- the more effective planning for the apprentices to develop and apply their essential skills within their professional and technical training;
- the good progress made by the remaining apprentices in completing their qualifications, resulting in almost all of them being on target to achieve their full framework by the end of March 2015; and
- the much enhanced systems in place to monitor and track the progress of each apprentice, which are used well to inform planning.

The areas which require further development are:

- the more timely delivery of the essential skills training, including any additional support required, for apprentices for whom English is not their first language;
- the limited training and learning resources available to support the delivery of the training;
- access by the apprentices to appropriate careers, education, information, advice and guidance relating to possible progression pathways to further training and education; and
- the overall retention and achievement rates, particularly those on the level 3 programme which are satisfactory at 66%.

Conclusion

In food and drink manufacturing, the quality of training provided by A4e remains satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement remain to be addressed if the needs of all the apprentices are to be met effectively.

Hospitality and Catering

At the time of the original inspection in March 2013, the quality of the training provided by A4e in hospitality and catering was inadequate; the inspection identified significant areas for improvement to be addressed in the ApprenticeshipsNI provision. These included:

- the inadequate management and quality assurance of the provision;
- the ineffective use of up-to-date management information, at all levels, to promote improvement; and
- the quality of teaching, training and learning, including further development of tutors' pedagogic skills and effective use of information and learning technology to promote and enhance the apprentices' learning.

In the interval since the inspection, the following actions which affect the work of the organisation have taken place:

- the cessation of recruitment of apprentices to this area from February 2014;
- the termination of the sub-contract arrangements to deliver training;
- the reduction in the number of tutors providing training and assessment from four to one; and
- the implementation of training session observations by management to identify and share good practice, in order to support improvement in the quality of the training and learning.

The following are the most important improvements that have taken place since the original inspection:

- the improved use of data to track, monitor and review the progress of the apprentices in achieving their full frameworks;
- the improved quality assurance procedures to support ongoing improvements in the provision; and
- the improvements in the quality of teaching, training and learning which was evident in the directed training sessions observed.

The areas which require further improvement are:

- the overall retention rate which remains satisfactory; and
- to maintain up-to-date and accurate contact details of the apprentices, including more regular communication with the apprentices and their employers to encourage them to complete their full framework by the end of March 2015.

Conclusion

In hospitality and catering, the quality of training provided by A4e is now satisfactory; the strengths outweigh areas for improvement in the provision. The organisation has demonstrated some evidence of improvement but important areas for improvement remain to be addressed if the needs of all of the apprentices are to be met effectively.

© CROWN COPYRIGHT 2015

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part, except for commercial purposes or in connection with a prospectus or advertisement, provided that the source and date thereof are stated.

Copies of this report are available on the ETI website:
www.etini.gov.uk

