

Damar Training Limited

Inspection report

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Name of lead inspector: Stephen Miller HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: 1st Floor
Petersgate House
64 St Petersgate
Stockport
Cheshire
SK1 1HE

Telephone number: 0161 480 8171

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Information about the provider

1. Damar Training Limited (DT) is a private independent learning provider based in Stockport, Greater Manchester. DT provides intermediate, advanced and higher apprenticeships in business, administration and law funded by the Skills Funding Agency. Currently 250 intermediate apprentices and 231 advanced apprentices are following programmes in business, administration and law on employer-responsive provision. Fourteen per cent of DT learners receive training from other providers under subcontracting arrangements. Eleven learners are funded on a commercial basis. The delivery of most training and assessment is conducted on employers' premises. DT employs 34 staff.

2. DT works with learners and around 140 employers across the North West, predominantly in Greater Manchester. Both Stockport and Greater Manchester have a population with a gender balance that mirrors that of the UK as a whole, approximately 49% male and 51% female. At 9.6% the percentage of non-White British residents in Stockport is significantly lower than the 15.6% for Greater Manchester as a whole, which is in turn slightly lower than the 16.4% for England. Many areas of Stockport are fairly affluent but DT serves a range of communities, many of which have some degree of deprivation.

3. The provider does not provide training on behalf of any other organisations.

4. The following organisations provide training on behalf of the provider:
 - BPP (apprenticeship programmes)
 - HHSC (apprenticeship programmes)
 - The Training Brokers (pre-employment courses)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Employer provision: Apprenticeships	256 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	1
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2
Subject Areas	
Business, administration and law	2

Overall effectiveness

5. Outcomes for learners at DT are outstanding. Learners enjoy their training and make exceptional progress. Most successfully complete their qualification before their planned end date. Success rates are high. They are above the national rates and have remained so for the last three years. Effective monitoring of learners' progress ensures that there are no significant variations in the attainment of different groups of learners. Learners gain in confidence and self-esteem, developing particularly good employability skills that are much valued by their employers. Learners improve their employment prospects and most progress to more responsible positions in sustained employment at the end of their training.
6. Training, coaching and assessment are good, with effective planning and detailed feedback to learners. The monitoring of learners' progress is thorough and learners have a clear understanding of what they need to do to progress. Formal group teaching sessions are satisfactory.
7. The broad range of courses successfully meets the needs of learners and employers, with opportunities for learners to progress from pre-employment to higher-level courses. Outstanding links with employers are used very effectively

- to support and benefit learners. Overall support for learners is good but the planning of literacy and numeracy support needs to be improved.
8. Senior managers set high standards and have a well-informed strategic direction to grow and improve the company, meeting local and national priorities. A strong focus is placed on improving learners' outcomes. Communication is excellent and staff value the open culture of management. The promotion of equality and diversity is much improved since the previous inspection and is now good.
 9. Quality improvement measures are improved and accurately identify areas for improvement. The very robust systems in place to ensure the quality of assessment are being extended to cover all aspects of the learning process.
 10. Good use is made of learners' and employers' views to make improvements to the provision. The company manages its resources effectively and provides outstanding value for money.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Overall success rates for intermediate and advanced apprentices are high and significantly above the national rates. Learners enjoy their learning programmes and make excellent progress. A high number of learners successfully complete their qualification early or within their planned end date. The standard of learners' work is exceptional.
- Learners considerably improve their confidence and self-esteem. They are highly motivated and make good contributions to their learning and development. Learners develop particularly good employability skills. Employers speak highly of the skills and competencies that learners develop which make a good contribution to organisational effectiveness. Learner progression to sustained employment is excellent.
- Training, coaching and assessment are good. Assessment planning is very clear and learners have a good understanding of what they need to do to progress. Assessment feedback is prompt and constructive. Assessors monitor learners' progress rigorously. Formal group teaching sessions are satisfactory.
- The provision is closely aligned with employment opportunities and most learners successfully gain employment at the end of their qualification. Programmes are planned very flexibly to accommodate learners' work routines and personal circumstances. The provision for literacy and numeracy support requires further development.
- DT's excellent links with employers are used effectively to enable joint working to develop tailored courses that best meet the needs of employers and learners. Highly productive partnerships with the local council have been successful at targeting disengaged groups of learners.

- Learners receive good care, guidance and support. DT's staff are always available and are highly approachable, providing prompt and effective responses to learners. Learners are positive about the impact of the support on their success. Initial assessment is comprehensive, timely and fully used in the planning of learners' programmes.
- Senior managers set high standards for their staff and have an aspirational vision for the continued growth of the company that is grounded on a firm understanding of local and national needs. Senior managers have a strong focus on improving outcomes for all learners which is central to the company's objectives. Staff value the open management culture and the excellent communication.
- Safeguarding is a key priority for the provider and arrangements to keep learners safe are good. Policies are clear and understood by staff. Safeguarding training for staff is well planned and carried out frequently. The support provided by DT for vulnerable learners is very effective with particularly effective links with a variety of external agencies.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. DT has a strong ambition to be an increasingly inclusive organisation and it works closely with a wide range of diverse communities to fulfil this goal. Good use is made of data to analyse the progress of different groups of learners. DT is working hard to ensure that staff confidence in embedding equality and diversity in learning continues to develop.
- Quality improvement arrangements are firmly established and are a useful tool for driving the organisation forward. The user-engagement strategy is highly effective and has a good impact on the content and quality of the provision. The observation of assessment practice is well established and provides useful feedback to assessors. DT recognises the importance of extending this to include all aspects of learning and is working hard to do this.
- DT uses resources particularly effectively to provide outstanding value for money. Outcomes for learners are outstanding and continue to improve. All staff benefit from carefully thought out and ongoing, useful professional development. Learners and staff have access to a wide range of excellent resources to support learning.

What does Damar Training Limited need to do to improve further?

- Develop the planning of literacy and numeracy to ensure all learners who require help receive consistent support and measure its effectiveness through data analysis.
- Build on the highly effective processes of observation of assessment practice to extend this rigour to all learning process across all provision. Ensure that the observations are used to improve the planning and delivery of learning both in the workplace and in the classroom.

- Ensure that the training for all staff on equality and diversity is effectively used so that the principles of equality and diversity are consistently reinforced in teaching, learning and assessment.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- being able to learn at their own pace
- the support they receive from DT staff
- assessors' good subject knowledge
- the opportunity to progress quickly
- that the courses are tailored to meet their individual needs
- the friendly and very approachable staff
- the way the experience at DT restores their confidence in training and learning
- improved employment opportunities.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the amount of time allocated for private study
- the teaching of key skills
- increase the number of assessment visits.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- DT's understanding of business
- the support that is provided by DT
- learners' quick progress
- the way DT has helped tailor qualifications to meet individual business needs
- the flexible approach DT has when arranging assessment visits.

What employers would like to see improved:

- the limited number of pre-employment courses.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

11. Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Overall success rates for all learners are high and have continued to improve since the previous inspection. Similarly the number of learners who achieve early or within their planned timescale is high and has continued to improve. Very effective systems are in place to identify learners who fall behind and effective support is available to help them complete their qualification. Provider data indicate that current learners are making excellent progress. DT has made good progress in addressing the key areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection.
12. Senior managers have a clear vision for the company and a very strong focus on ensuring the company continues to improve, setting high standards and expectations for its staff. Data usage has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Management information is now accurate and used effectively to monitor performance more closely. Improved communication has ensured that staff have greater clarity about their roles and responsibilities. The promotion of equality and diversity has much improved. Data are used more effectively to monitor and improve the achievement of different groups of learners. DT recognises that more work needs to be done to include equality and diversity in learning sessions. Similarly, the planning of support for learners who require help with their literacy and numeracy needs to be further improved.
13. The self-assessment process is good. It is inclusive and understood by staff. The resulting report is concise and broadly accurate. Quality improvement systems are firmly established to assess the quality of assessment although these need to be extended to include all aspects of learning. Action plans are clearly written, regularly reviewed and effectively used.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 1

14. Outcomes for learners are outstanding. Learners enjoy their learning programmes and make excellent progress. Their confidence and self-esteem are much improved. Learners are highly motivated and participate very willingly in their development and independent study. The standard of learners' work is exceptional and all current learners are making excellent progress. Overall success rates for intermediate and advanced apprentices are high, and significantly above the national rates, and have remained so for the last three years. The number of learners who complete their qualification before or within their planned end date is very high. There are no significant differences in the achievement of learners from different backgrounds.

15. Learners develop particularly good employability skills. Employers speak highly of the skills and competencies that learners develop and which make a good contribution to organisational effectiveness.
16. Learners have a very clear understanding of their workplace rights and responsibilities and adopt safe working practices. They feel safe and can clearly explain safeguarding and equality and diversity in the workplace.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

17. Training, coaching and assessment are good. Assessment planning is very clear and learners have a good understanding of what they need to do to progress. Assessment feedback is prompt and constructive. Good use is made of initial assessment results. Assessors make clear distinctions between training and assessment activities. Records of observations are detailed but insufficient use is made of technology for recording findings. Assessors monitor learners' progress rigorously. Learners receive good workplace training although it is not always fully linked to their individual learning plans.
18. Group teaching sessions are satisfactory. They are effective and successfully engage learners, but lesson plans are not routinely used by tutors. Resources to support learning are excellent but too little use is made of information and learning technology. Opportunities to reinforce equality and diversity are not integrated into the learning sessions. Staff have good levels of recent commercial experience
19. Programmes successfully meet learners' and employers' needs. Opportunities are available to progress from pre-employment courses to advanced apprenticeships and higher-level courses. The flexible approach to the apprenticeship programmes is highly effective in meeting learners' and employers' needs. Programmes are planned very flexibly to accommodate learners' work routines and personal circumstances.
20. Partnership links with employers, which benefit learners, are outstanding. DT has particularly strong and effective arrangements with a wide range of employers that provide excellent opportunities for learners to progress with much improved employment prospects. Very effective joint working with employers results in courses that are tailor made to meet the business needs of employers. At a strategic level, local partnerships with a variety of groups, including the local authority, ensure that the development of programmes is aligned with local and national priorities. Very effective links with the local council have been successful in engaging hard-to-reach learners.
21. Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Staff are very approachable, providing prompt and effective responses to learners' needs. Learners are provided with clear information about support agencies through a comprehensive learner handbook. Learners are fully informed and well prepared for their programmes. Information, advice and guidance for learners are good

and provided throughout their training. Initial assessment is comprehensive and timely and it fully informs the planning of individual learning programmes. Support for learners who require help with their literacy and numeracy is in place but its planning is insufficiently clear.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

22. Senior managers at DT set high standards for their staff and have developed a well-informed strategic plan to grow and develop the company. Continued improvement in outcomes for all learners is a key priority for senior managers. Development of the provision is based on a clear, well-informed understanding of local and national priorities. Firmly established performance management arrangements ensure high levels of accountability for all staff. Staff understand the overall strategic aims of the company. Senior managers are highly responsive in understanding and meeting the needs of learners and employers. DT has made significant improvements in the collection and management of data which are used appropriately to set challenging improvement targets for the whole organisation and for individual staff.
23. Communication is excellent. Weekly and monthly staff and team meetings closely review what is being delivered and success rates against planned end dates. Monthly bulletins are valued and informative. Opportunities to share good practice and inform strategic planning are very good. Staff value the high level of support they receive and the open management culture. The individual training needs of staff are clearly linked to the annual appraisal process and staff development is very good.
24. Safeguarding is a key priority for the provider and arrangements to keep learners safe are good. Policies are clear and understood by staff. Safeguarding training for staff is carefully planned and carried out frequently. Staff are skilled at identifying learners who are vulnerable and are clear about how this is reported. Where learners have been identified as being vulnerable, support provided by DT is very effective with well planned joint working with a variety of external agencies. Criminal Records Bureau checks are carried out on all staff and a register is centrally maintained. Risk assessments are in place to ensure that learners are protected throughout their course. The provider works very effectively in raising awareness of safeguarding with employers.
25. DT has a very strong focus on ensuring the organisation is inclusive and works within the community to engage groups under-represented in learning. Good use is made of learner data to compare different groups of learners to ensure there are no significant differences in their levels of attainment. A comprehensive equality and diversity policy is in place which is effective at ensuring that the company meets its legislative duties. Staff have a good understanding of cultural differences. A current project is successfully working with the local Jewish community to support access to a wider range of learning opportunities and in particular to progress into higher learning. Training and frequent updates raise staff awareness of equality and diversity very effectively

but more work needs to be done to ensure that opportunities to reinforce learners' understanding are incorporated into learning sessions.

26. The learner and employer engagement strategy supports and promotes improvement very effectively. Learners' views are collated in a wide variety of ways at all levels with regular surveys and discussions. Good use is being made of social networking sites to gather ongoing views of users. Employers' views are collected on a regular basis and are effectively used in the planning of provision. Learners and employers give a wide range of examples of how course delivery has been amended to suit their needs better. Regular random audits of learners and employers ensure that any issues or requests for change are quickly implemented.
27. Quality assurance arrangements have improved since the previous inspection. These are now firmly established and are used appropriately to ensure the organisation continues to improve. The self-assessment process is inclusive, and the report is evaluative and comprehensive. DT has a good understanding of what needs to improve which is appropriately identified in the quality improvement plan. The targets against which improvements are measured are mainly clear and monthly data reports are used effectively to monitor progress. Staff targets have a strong focus on learners' outcomes but lack clarity in linking to broader company objectives.
28. The observation of assessment practice is comprehensive, thorough and well established. It provides good information for quality improvement. Observation of formal learning, induction and reviews, to include subcontractors, is not sufficiently well planned. This is recognised by DT which has firm plans in place to address this.
29. Value for money is outstanding. Success rates are high and have remained so for the last three years. Learners have good access to a range of high-quality resources. Learners make exceptional progress. Staff turnover and absences are particularly low. Continuous professional development is carefully planned and used to support the development of the organisation and individual promotion. Very effective use is made of learners' and employers' views to improve the provision.

Information about the inspection

30. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's training manager, 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 funding body, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.
31. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Damar Training Limited

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	481	481
Part-time learners		
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	1	1
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	1	
How well do learners attain their learning goals? How well do learners progress?	1 1	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
Quality of provision	2	
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	1	

* where applicable to the type of provision

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Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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