



Self assessment report 2010

[NB: Some commercially sensitive text has been blanked out]

Contents

1.	<i>Introduction and Methodology</i>	4
2.	<i>Last Self-Assessment Report and Changes Since</i>	5
3.	<i>Conclusions</i>	7
3.1	Overall Effectiveness	7
3.2	Capacity to improve: Grade 2/1, Good	7
3.2.1	Does Damar have a sound track record of sustained improvement?	7
3.2.2	Does Damar set and meet ambitious targets to improve outcomes for all learners?	8
3.2.3	Does Damar have a clear vision and appropriate priorities that will sustain improvement and raise expectations for all users?	9
3.2.4	Do Damar’s processes for self-assessment and quality improvement include appropriate use of the views of users and lead to demonstrable impact?	9
3.2.5	Does Damar have an appropriate management structure and sufficient staff and other resources to carry through its plans for improvement?	9
3.2.6	Do staff at all levels contribute to securing sustained improvements?.....	10
3.2.7	Do the directors fulfill their duties and ask challenging questions to raise or maintain high standards and secure positive learner experiences and outcomes?.....	10
4.	<i>Outcomes for Learners: Grade 2, Good</i>	11
4.1	Learners’ attainment of their learning goals	11
4.2	How well do learners progress?	12
4.3	How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	14
4.4	How safe do learners feel?	14
4.5	Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?	15
4.6	How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?	16
5.	<i>Quality of Provision: Grade 2/1, Good</i>	16
5.1	How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	16
5.2	How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	18
5.3	How effectively does the provider use partnerships to develop its provision to meet learners’ needs?	19
5.4	How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals?	20
6.	<i>Leadership and management: Grade 2, Good</i>	21
6.1	How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	21
6.2	How effectively do the directors provide leadership, direction and challenge?	22
6.3	How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	22

6.4	How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	23
6.5	How effectively does Damar engage with users to support and promote improvement?	27
6.6	How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	28

1. Introduction and Methodology

For over 30 years, Damar Training (Damar) has been providing business skills training and assessment from our base in Stockport, Greater Manchester. Apprenticeships and NVQs account for almost all of our provision and to support this we have a contract with the Skills Funding Agency as well as access to funding from the European Social Fund (ESF) and the National Health Service's Invest in Health programme. Our main areas of delivery are:

- Business and Administration
- Customer Service
- Accounts
- Management and Team Leading
- Contact Centre Operations

In addition, we have a small number of learners who are funded on a commercial basis towards all, or part, of the qualifications above. We have continued to work on a limited basis with learners on IT and Payroll awards.

Damar has 23 members of staff, 14 of whom are involved in training and assessment (although two are primarily involved in management). This level of staff is consistent with the numbers outlined in our last self assessment.

The first draft of this report was primarily assembled by Damar's Training Manager, with input from the Managing Director and Contracts Manager. This was reviewed by all staff at a development day and then amended and updated to reflect this input. The executive summary of the final document will be made available on our website with the opportunity for all learners and employers to offer comments and feedback.

Outcome data for 2007/8 and 2008/9 are per the Ofsted provider performance report. 2009/10 data is Skills Funding Agency data as at period 13. Data has also been drawn from the notes of Large Programme Reviews, records of quality calls made to learners and questionnaires completed by leavers.

2. Last Self-Assessment Report and Changes Since

Damar's last self assessment was conducted in December 2009, with our last full inspection being in June 2006.

Since our last self assessment, it has been a period of significant change for work based learning and the country as a whole. We have seen a change in Government, a rise in unemployment as the result of a harsh recession, the abolition of the LSC and creation of the Skills Funding agency as well as the development of the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). These changes have provided challenges for Damar, but through effective planning in advance of these changes and successful responses to the changes we have been able to continue to develop the quality and breadth of our provision.

A key development has been in terms of geographical spread. Whilst retaining a strong base in Stockport, we are now a Greater Manchester provider with the addition of learners in Lancashire, Cheshire and Merseyside. This promotes our vision to be the leading provider for our vocational areas in the North West. Damar plans to spread and deepen our offering yet further. Linked to this is further participation in local and regional forums and network groups which has helped to increase Damar's profile.

Learner recruitment figures have been largely maintained. Our carry in figure for 2010/11 was 291, a 12.6% decrease on the previous year (333). However, this is as a result of higher completion rates as well as caution in relation to the funding environment, given that our initial contract for 10/11 was lower than our actual outcome for 09/10. The actual number of work based learning starts only fell by 3 (1%). In response to this, and as confidence increased in our ability to fund the demand for our services, we have invested further in our business development team, creating three new positions, improving our marketing material and implementing a bonus structure. Significant improvements have also been made to processes in this area, with the introduction of the Recruitment Guide which has standardised the approach across the team. Early indications demonstrate a positive trend as a result, with a total of 235 learners enrolled between August 2010 and January 2011.

Learner outcomes have increased considerably, up from 205 in 08/09 to 371 in 09/10 (81% increase). Success rates have also increased and demonstrate less variation between subject areas. The number of non-achievers has dropped by 22%, a direct result of better matching of learners to awards and improvements to assessment planning and delivery.

Damar has moved to the new QCF framework very smoothly, with time spent on training staff in preparation for this. Quality of delivery remains high, with no actions recorded by our external verifiers from EDI or AAT. We also recorded a 0% error rate in our ESF funding audit. This level of quality was confirmed by Damar being awarded the Training Quality Standard (TQS).

Damar has invested in improvements to facilities; doubling our office space and adding three additional training rooms. Our toilet facilities have also been refurbished. This will allow us to increase the number of learners we can accommodate on site and offer a wider range of off-the-job training opportunities.

Future development will see Damar capitalize on the hard work and success of recent years, with our new Accelerate programme, further expansion of learner recruitment, maintenance of high success rates and increased partnership working over the coming year.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Overall Effectiveness

How effective and efficient is Damar in meeting the needs of learners and other users and why?

Damar's capacity to make and sustain improvements:	Grade 2/1	Good
Outcomes for learners:	Grade 2	Good
The quality of provision:	Grade 2/1	Good
Leadership and management: Safeguarding: Grade 2/1, Good/Excellent Equality and diversity: Grade 3, Satisfactory	Grade 2	Good

Where we have indicated a Grade of 2/1 it is because we have concluded that this area of our provision is Good and moving towards (but not yet at) Outstanding.

3.2 Capacity to improve: Grade 2/1, Good

What is Damar's capacity to make and sustain improvements?

To what extent:

3.2.1 Does Damar have a sound track record of sustained improvement?

Damar has made significant improvements over the last three years and continues to do so. The results of these improvements to date demonstrate a consistency of performance over a sustained period of time, which offers the required stability from which to build further. Key indicators of this include:

- An upward trend in overall success rates, with decreasing variation in results across subject areas and between learners. Furthermore, Management and Team Leading provision has been introduced with a success rate of 86% in their first full year together.
- A learner and employer base that is growing and includes an increasing number of larger, more complex employers.
- The investment in refurbishing Damar's premises, which has resulted in the office space being doubled.

- The award of the Training Quality Standard, which recognises the sustained high quality of service offered to all of our learners and employers.
- Further investment in new staff, coupled with better ongoing development and rewards for existing staff has led to consistently low staff-turnover and therefore a more experienced, better qualified team.
- Continuous review and development of systems and processes, resulting in a more standardised approach across all departments. This includes streamlining assessment techniques and documentation in line with the new QCF standards, introducing best practice guides for the business development and administration teams (to accompany the assessor guide), as well as better communication of a more structured schedule of meetings.

3.2.2 Does Damar set and meet ambitious targets to improve outcomes for all learners?

The transparency of Damar's aims and objectives is a real strength and this promotes a focused approach to setting and achieving outcome targets. The business development and training teams have well understood, ambitious targets individually and as a group. These are communicated and monitored effectively and in a very visual way, through display boards.

In the last three years Damar has set challenging targets to promote continuous improvement. The consistency in achievement of these targets is evidenced by the 09/10 cohort, which demonstrates that overall success rates continued to increase and the variation between different subject areas and learners was further reduced.

Refinements to our assessment planning process have aided us in achieving an even closer match between learner needs and expectations and the programme we deliver. This has allowed more effective differentiation of targets to better support learners with specific needs and challenge talented learners to extend themselves.

The diagnosis of additional learning and social needs has been identified as an area for improvement. An action plan is in place to address this with the objective of further individualising the training and assessment plans for all learners.

3.2.3 Does Damar have a clear vision and appropriate priorities that will sustain improvement and raise expectations for all users?

Damar's vision is centred on providing a high quality, inclusive and responsive service to all of our learners and employers with the expectation that this will allow us to cement ourselves as the leading provider of business skills training.

This vision is fully embedded in the work of the whole team. It underpins policy and drives procedure and is thoroughly understood by staff and effectively promoted to learners and employers.

3.2.4 Do Damar's processes for self-assessment and quality improvement include appropriate use of the views of users and lead to demonstrable impact?

Damar has a structured approach to gathering the views of users and this has informed our self-assessment process and decision making in regard to quality improvement (evidence of improvements made can be found in section 6.5 below). On an ongoing basis, learners and employers are asked to comment on our service through telephone interviews, face-to-face programme reviews and written questionnaires. During the past year we have also hosted a focus group event, which brought together around a dozen of our key employers to discuss how we can best address their needs in the current climate.

Learners and employers have a range of channels through which they can (and do) offer feedback voluntarily, including access to appropriate staff contact details as well as Facebook, Twitter and Damar's blog.

We have improved the way in which we collate and analyse the views raised through these methods, although it would be beneficial to centralise the storage of data and standardise our approach to analysis. A full learner survey will also be conducted before July 2011.

3.2.5 Does Damar have an appropriate management structure and sufficient staff and other resources to carry through its plans for improvement?

Damar has made significant investments in staff, resources and structure since our last self assessment report.

The improvements to Damar's premises have created better quality, additional training rooms, which has allowed us to increase the number of learners we can accommodate on-site. This has also enabled us to minimise learner access to staff work areas which has had a positive impact on quality.

The business development team has grown, with the addition of three new staff members. This supports our objective to increase the number and diversity of learners on programme and the volume and range of employers we work with.

New assessors have been brought into the training team, adding further diversity to the occupational experience of the group. We have increased the amount of internal and external training for the team and the change in structure, involving the introduction of two team leaders, has now had time to bed-in. This has resulted in a better qualified, more experienced team with better systems and processes to monitor performance. With the intended increase in learner numbers, further additions to the team are planned.

The quality team has been improved with the addition of a quality administrator to assist the Contract Manager and Training Manager. As Damar continues to grow, further resource will be required to coordinate quality improvement.

3.2.6 Do staff at all levels contribute to securing sustained improvements?

Damar possesses a real strength in the willingness of all staff to voluntarily contribute positively to improving our provision. This is something that is encouraged by management and regularly acted on. In recognising the importance of this input, some team members have been given the opportunity to formalise their involvement in areas such as quality and equality and diversity.

More formally, monthly staff development days provide a forum for discussion and improvement for all staff. Departmental sessions also run regularly to standardise and progress our approach. Specific topics, such as safeguarding and equality and diversity, have been picked up through individual training sessions and policy impact assessments.

3.2.7 Do the directors fulfill their duties and ask challenging questions to raise or maintain high standards and secure positive learner experiences and outcomes?

Damar's Managing Director works closely with all departments to ensure that performance is planned and monitored effectively day to day. Our second director provides strategic/non-executive input and is responsible for overall financial control. Their communication links are strong, and weekly departmental meetings, monthly management meetings and managerial one-to-one reviews combine successfully to maintain the organisation's focus on positive outcomes.

4. Outcomes for Learners: Grade 2, Good

How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning:

4.1 Learners' attainment of their learning goals

In order to determine how successfully Damar is in helping our learners to achieve their learning goals, we have made some important improvements to our approach since our last self assessment:

- The introduction of our Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) document has promoted more detailed investigation into employer and learner needs and goals.
- Assessment planning has always been a highly individualised process at Damar. However, we have worked hard to refine our approach to achieve the closest match between a person's role requirements and their chosen units.
- Our methods of gathering learner and employer feedback has become more sophisticated and systematic, with quality calls and exit reviews being used much more effectively to generate and analyse the views of our users.

In line with trends detailed in our last self assessment, learners continue to achieve to a very good standard and at a very good rate. This is evidenced by:

- Overall Apprenticeship success rates of 83% in the 09/10 cohort with reduced variation between most awards, with the exception of smaller cohorts where the impact of leavers is more pronounced. It is also noteworthy that a more settled, experienced team of assessors allowed the average number of completions per assessor to increase by 62%.
- Continued success in tailoring large programmes, where we have 5 or more learners. Eight of these employers enjoyed a 100% success rate, including [REDACTED].
- Maintaining the use of as many units as possible in each award. This has been carried through in the transition to QCF and has allowed us to work with learners and employers to match programmes closely to their desired learning goals. The increased flexibility of the QCF has facilitated even closer tailoring so far in the 10/11 cohort and the disaggregation of units has made courses more accessible for learners with more basic job roles.
- A significant drop (22%) in learners leaving their programme without achieving. Very few learners fail to achieve their goals before their funding end date.

- Very positive feedback from learners and employers. 96% of learners who received a quality call in 09/10 felt they received lots of support and were happy with how their course was progressing. Of this same group, 100% were involved in selecting their units and these were units they wanted to achieve.

Whilst this evidence strongly supports high achievement, there are areas we have identified for development:

- Success rates for smaller cohorts, such as those for Accounts, are still at risk of being adversely affected by non-achievers. Plans are in place to counter this, including the action of conducting more stringent tests on learners applying for AAT Accounts courses.
- 21% of learners surveyed in quality calls felt their course could be completed more quickly. This may suggest that in some instances we could strike a better balance when agreeing target dates.
- Whilst we have worked hard to increase the quality and regularity of learner feedback, a full satisfaction survey of all learners is planned before our next self assessment.
- Plans are in place to allow better diagnosis of learners with additional learning needs, to enable more specific learning goals to be achieved.

Judgement:

Overall success rates have improved and are more consistent, supporting the fact that learner achievement is very good.

4.2 How well do learners progress?

Continuous development and lifelong learning remain underpinning factors in our ethos. Evidence supports this:

- We continue to place a large number of NEET learners into full-time employment.
- Many learners progress within Damar from level 2 to level 3, or in some cases from one vocational area to another. Although it is more difficult to quantify, there continue to be numerous examples of learners being rewarded with promotions and progressing within their organisations.
- Success rates for key skills remain high, which is evidence of learners developing competencies for life.

This evidence is the end product of key developments since our last self assessment:

- Accelerate© will provide a better progression route for learners who are new to work or are returning to work. The investment in business development will create more job opportunities for apprentices and the increased support and training will ensure learners are given the best chance to advance.
- The ONA procedure has placed a greater focus on employer and learner needs. In working towards these objectives it is felt that the opportunity for learner to progress within their organisation is increased.
- Damar has identified two members of staff to complete IAG qualifications to allow us to better support and signpost learners in terms of progression. We have also used links with bodies such as Aim Higher to good effect with examples of two learners progressing to university degree courses.
- Difficulties in the economic climate have been dealt with successfully. We have promoted the benefit of apprentices as new recruits and training for current staff to ensure continued progression for learners.
- The development of newer awards, such as Team Leading and Management, have provided a further option for progression for learners promoted at work.
- Better use of our exit review documentation includes the introduction of an assessor recommendation section which allows clearer communication of progression opportunities between the assessor team and their colleagues in recruitment.

Judgement:

Learner progression is highly dependent on the availability of government funding. This said, progression amongst our learners remains good and continues to improve.

4.3 How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?

Helping learners into work and guiding them successfully towards completing qualifications has a direct impact on their economic and social well-being. Damar has invested in our business development team, with the objective of increasing the number of vacancies and starts and we continue to provide good support to this end:

- The 09/10 cohort consisted of 371 starts, 290 of whom were apprentices. Of the apprentices, only 28 learners left the course without completing (25 due to losing their job). This number could have been higher but we have worked hard to re-place learners with some success. We have also worked closely with our awarding bodies to agree new assessment approaches for learners who lose their job. This has resulted in a number of successful completions, where previously a learner may not have achieved.
- Analysis of learners' salaries is challenging as it is not recorded for those already in employment. However, for the 92 learners we placed into employment between August and October 2010, the average salary was £154 per week. However, included in this, is the generation of 12 apprenticeship places at large employer with an annual salary of £16,500. Stripping out this employer, the average moves to £130 per week.
- Feedback from learners and employers is very positive and suggests that many learners progress within their roles as outlined above.

Judgment:

Damar has a positive impact on improving learners economic and social well-being. The new Accelerate© programme and plans to be involved in employability skills training will allow this impact to be felt more widely.

4.4 How safe do learners feel?

Pastoral care has always been high on Damar's agenda and we continue to provide this to a very good standard from recruitment through to completion. Improvements over recent years to safeguarding procedures has allowed us to determine how effective this is and to make thorough checks in this regard. Since our last self assessment, these processes have become firmly embedded to good effect:

- All learners receive the 'Be Safe' guide and the induction workbook has been improved to include a more thorough section on safeguarding. Learners also have better access to key contact details for staff members.

- All learners are asked if they feel safe at every assessment visit. This question is also asked at large programme reviews and in quality calls. Of the quality calls conducted in 09/10, 100% of learners said they felt safe and had been treated fairly.
- Crucially, asking this question at review has given the opportunity for some learners to raise safety concerns. These have all been dealt with swiftly and sensitively through to their conclusion.

Judgment:

Safeguarding practice is excellent and a key strength for Damar and our learners.

4.5 Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well-being?

Health and safety is well embedded and covered thoroughly during recruitment, induction, assessment, technical certificate and ERR booklets. Further improvements over the last year include:

- A revamped induction workbook which includes a list of useful contacts for health and welfare related issues. An induction questionnaire has also been added to ensure learners have the required basic information for their own safety.
- Many larger employers have good internal systems which support health and well-being. Events that some of our learners have had access to include advice on quitting smoking, stress in the workplace and introductions to minority faiths.
- Damar has invested in IAG, with two staff members currently completing qualifications. In addition, development day sessions (such as drugs awareness) have been organised for staff to increase their knowledge.
- Ad-hoc themes have been introduced to learners, such as road safety and the opportunity to be involved in a study investigating the experiences of learners who are lesbian, gay, bi or transsexual. However, it is difficult to assess the impact that this has had.

Judgement:

Practice in this area is satisfactory, although plans are in place to promote health and well-being more proactively.

4.6 How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?

- In finding employment for our learners, Damar allows learners to make a very positive contribution to their community. This is especially evident at more rural employers, with high unemployment and poor transport links, where we have been able to develop apprenticeship programmes which draw on staff from local communities.
- Learners and employers have organised and promoted some notable charity events since our last self assessment. This includes a charity shark dive, in which a member of our team participated. Damar has also organised an event for Children in Need, which learners were able to participate in if they wished.

Judgement:

Learners do make a positive contribution to their community. Our challenge is to offer opportunities to learners more proactively.

5. Quality of Provision: Grade 2/1, Good

5.1 How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?

Damar's longstanding, well-embedded planning, delivery and assessment methods continue to provide a stable base for strong provision, evidenced by the improving success rates for learners. These include:

- Sound individual assessment planning procedures which allow the closest match between learner needs and the programme delivered to be achieved. This is evidenced in the wide variety of units delivered in every award each cohort, showing that learners are not limited in the units they have access to.
- Assessment methods continue to be refined and the use of digital evidence has improved further, with 'evidence in situ' and 'discussion' documents being merged to promote more efficient use of this method.
- Drop in sessions and exam sittings at on a Tuesday evening continue to be popular and work well to provide additional support for learners, or an option for learners without access to a computer or quiet study are at home.

- Subject specialists continue to be used to good effect to provide tailored support to learners on specific topics, in particular IT skills.
- Standardisation sessions and monthly 'development days' continue to facilitate discussion and continuous improvement. The introduction of a subject specific standardisation meeting for Management and Team Leading has been beneficial.
- We continue to tailor courses effectively for employers, using a range of innovations such as the ILEX secretarial award as a substitute for the Business Administration Technical Certificate. This is evidenced by further success in regard to integrating our awards with internal training. For example, [REDACTED] have been able to link our awards to their 'Brand Standards' and [REDACTED] have identified Customer Service Apprenticeships as an ideal follow-on from their induction training.

Since our last self assessment, we have also worked hard to improve the way we support learning and development:

- The initial assessment process has been reworked with a two-stage assessment process being introduced. This is still in its infancy, and further work is planned to ensure effective implementation.
- The technical certificate course has been entirely rewritten in response to feedback from Damar staff and learners which suggested the previous materials had become tired. The decision has also been taken to merge Business Administration and Customer Service learners, in order to allow further development of knowledge outside of the set syllabus. Early indications show that this has been well received by learners and success rates continue to be high.
- Planning and implementation of the new QCF standards was good, and this has allowed further tailoring of courses to meet learner needs. For example, making good use of the rules of combination to include different levels of unit within the same programme and adhering to barred combinations to encourage learners to widen the range of units they complete.
- In the 09/10 cohort, assessor caseloads were kept lower than average, allowing increased flexibility in delivery of provision. Although caseloads have risen, plans are in place to increase staff levels to replicate this approach.
- Improvements have been made in building assessor caseloads with a sector bias, such as legal, healthcare and financial services. This has allowed assessors to foster stronger relationships with key employers and develop a specialist knowledge of these areas.

Further improvements are in progress or under development, such as:

- Damar's new Accelerate© apprenticeship programme, which includes a week long 'Welcome to Work' training course at the outset. The objective of this initiative is to better match learners with jobs and enhance the level of training they receive for that role, which should in turn have a positive effect on learner success and development in their career.
- We have identified two key skill specialists, who will provide more structured support to learners with additional needs.
- The accounts team now has an identified lead, and plans are in place for more structured standardisation and development meetings for this subject. In addition, new resources and materials are being developed to increase the quality of training and learners on this programme now receive two full college release days per month instead of one.
- Damar has begun working with a partner to integrate AMSPAR Medical Terminology qualifications into the Business Administration Apprenticeship, in response to what we consider to be a gap in provision for NHS learners.

Judgement:

Damar's teaching, training and assessment methods continue to very effectively support learning and development. The improvements made since our last self assessment have had a positive impact and further development opportunities have been identified to ensure that we continue to improve our provision in the future.

5.2 How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?

Damar has always placed learner needs at the centre of our provision, and we have listened carefully to their feedback and reacted appropriately. Historically, feedback has been very positive, but patchy in terms of process. Since our last self assessment, we have added more structure and sophistication to our approach:

- The introduction of the Organisational Needs Analysis (ONA) document has standardised our approach to identifying employer and learner needs at the outset. This has allowed better organisation of visit schedules and exams, for example, to best fit with the requirements of users.
- Innovative involvement of employers and learners in our decision making process, such as the employers' forum event at the Lowry, has allowed us to identify and discuss needs in detail.

- More structured, regular contact with learners, including one to one interviews, quality calls and questionnaires, in addition to an improved exit review document has led to significantly more comments and satisfaction data being available for analysis. The feedback is generated so far is overwhelmingly more positive than negative. More importantly, this approach has allowed prompt action to be taken where needs are not being met, or where there is a gap in our provision. For example, discussions with our NHS clients have driven our investigation into the use of AMSPAR Medical Terminology awards.

Judgement:

Learner and employer feedback supports the view that Damar is very effective in meeting the needs and interests of users.

5.3 How effectively does the provider use partnerships to develop its provision to meet learners' needs?

Damar has a number of existing key partners, with whom we continue to work with very effectively:

- Our work with Pure Innovations has allowed us to create a position for an apprentice with a disability, and then continue to support him through his studies.
- Maintaining strong links with a wide range of Connexions agencies remains an important factor in reaching learners from as many communities as possible.
- The 14-19 team at Stockport MBC continues to offer support and guidance.
- Promoting links with Aim Higher has allowed learners to access 'Step-In' courses with good successes, such as learners progressing to university courses.
- Strong relationships with the National Apprenticeship Service, awarding bodies and funding agencies has allowed us to ensure continued quality compliance and has allowed us to remain proactive in our approach to assessment and funding changes and opportunities.
- Damar continues to provide input to a variety of provider networks. This has allowed access to training events and discussion forums in areas such as safeguarding, QCF and Functional Skills. We were also invited by LSIS to provide input to a new peer support network which were able to do at the launch event.
- Our relationship with Skills for Health has been further cemented, allowing the expansion of our provision to learners at the NHS.

- Strong links with local schools are still in place, with continued success of our young apprenticeship programme at [REDACTED].

Further partnerships have been formed and nurtured since our last self assessment:

- Damar played an integral part in winning the [REDACTED] consortium bid, and we continue to drive the development of this group to ensure quality provision to local public sector apprentices.
- We have worked with the North-West Apprenticeship Company (an ATA) to offer apprenticeship placements to employers who may not have capacity to take a learner themselves.
- Damar has expanded the range of specialist providers we work with, adding to the relationships we have with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. We are now working with [REDACTED] to develop AMSPAR medical terminology awards and have finalised a subcontract agreement with HHSC, who offer housing qualifications. This will further increase the range of learner and employer needs that we can cater for.

Judgement:

Damar has a proven track record of working well with other organizations and bodies. However, since our last self assessment we have worked hard to actively develop and lead these partnerships to very effectively improve our provision to meet learners' needs.

5.4 How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals?

Damar continues to place care, guidance and support for learners at the heart of our provision. Learners receive close support from their assessor and we are responsive to learner requests and needs. Learners have access to email and mobile phone details for key members of staff, allowing them to raise any concerns or needs. Feedback suggests that Damar is very effective in the way we react to this and this is supported by success rates.

Our staff have a genuine interest in the individual success of every learner and we continue to celebrate this with our 'learner of the month' award and our yearly celebration event. Since our last self assessment, we have seen some learners being made redundant as a result of the economic downturn. The dedication of our team, and innovative assessment methods have allowed us to continue working with these learners towards a successful completion. One such learner took the time to email her assessor to inform her that she had managed to return to work and felt that having her apprenticeship was a key factor.

Improvements have been made to increase our effectiveness, such as:

- The creation of a new learner induction workbook, which offers clear advice and guidance in relation to all aspects of their course, employment and outside of work. It also provides much clearer information on safeguarding, equality and diversity, learner voice and the contact details for key staff members.
- A more structured approach to safeguarding, as outlined in section 6.3.
- Identifying two members of staff to undertake qualifications in Information Advice and Guidance, which will enhance our capability to support learners effectively.

Judgement:

Care, guidance and support have historically been a strength of Damar's provision. Further improvements have been made to ensure that this remains the case to ensure we are very effective in helping learners achieve their goals.

6. Leadership and management: Grade 2, Good

6.1 How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?

Existing strengths in this area have been maintained since our last self assessment assessment:

- Damar's overall vision is well established. Individual, team and organisation performance targets in support of this vision are clearly conveyed and understood. Each year this is set out at appraisal and then monitored and reviewed constantly, through one-to-one and team meetings. In 09/10 these targets were met.
- Communication remains good, with individual meetings, weekly team meetings and monthly communication and management meetings. In addition we continue to run our monthly development day. Other events over the last year have included a 2 day planning and development event for the training team and a similar meeting for the recruitment team.
- The assessor guide has been replicated across further departments with the addition of similar guides for recruitment and administration.
- The opportunity for staff to increase their responsibilities remains and is evident in the additional responsibilities handed to the accounts lead and in relation to quality, equality and diversity and key skills.

- Success is recognised, with targeted bonus structures in place for business development, recruitment and assessor teams. Damar continues to award an employee of the month at each communications meeting.

Judgement:

Expectations and ambitions are raised and promoted effectively by managers.

6.2 How effectively do the directors provide leadership, direction and challenge?

Damar's directors, particularly the Managing Director, remain central in providing leadership, direction and challenge. They are visible, approachable and involved operationally as well as strategically. This approach offers key internal and external strength:

- Internally, through monthly management meetings and individual one-to-one meetings with department leads, they are able to effectively communicate their vision and direction and cascade key information throughout the organisation.
- Externally, they are able to represent and build a quality reputation. This includes strong links with all stakeholders and relevant bodies, which allows proactive decisions to be taken in response to policy and strategy change, such as the direction of government funding. The managing director is particularly influential in the Greater Manchester provider networks and has made numerous positive contributions to the local skills agenda.

The strategic focus of the directors drives innovation of practice and identifies new opportunities, such as our recent subcontract agreement with another provider and the conception of Accelerate©.

Judgement:

Directors are very effective in providing leadership, direction and challenge.

6.3 How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?

Damar's safeguarding procedures have had some time to embed since our last self assessment and the results of this hard work are very positive:

- Our safeguarding policy is well understood and a central theme in our vision. It is comprehensively communicated, both internally and externally, through our website, marketing materials, recruitment process, learner induction workbook, reviews and quality assurance procedures. Posters are placed in key areas around the office to promote safeguarding to staff and visitors.

- Safeguarding remains a focus for staff, appearing as a standing agenda item at management meetings, assessor one-to-ones and team meetings.
- All staff have completed external and internal training and the designated and deputy designated people have attended a variety of events and workshops to keep their knowledge current. In addition, development day events such as 'drugs awareness' have been organised to increase staff knowledge.
- All staff undergo an enhanced CRB check and plans are in place to invest in picture ID badges for all staff.
- Reporting processes are well understood and followed by staff, learners and employers. Issues have been identified over the last year and dealt with very effectively and with great care, dedication and sensitivity. All documentation relating to any issue is kept 'live' and is 'owned' at every stage until a conclusion is reached.

Judgement:

Safeguarding is well embedded and very effective at Damar.

6.4 How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?

Statistical analysis against local and national comparators:

- Damar is based in Stockport and works with employers predominantly based 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 to 51% female. The percentage of non-White British residents in Stockport (9.6%) is significantly lower than Greater Manchester (15.6%) which is in turn slightly lower than the total for England (16.4%). The Office for National Statistics suggests that around 2.1% of the UK population have a disability and are available and want to work. Similarly, an Institute for Health Research paper states that 2% of the population in England has a learning difficulty.
- Damar has increased its cohort size by 160% in the last three years. In this time, the split of male to female learners has remained fairly constant and for 09/10 was 28.1% to 71.9%.
- Although the total number of non-White British learners has increased steadily from 10 in 07/08 to 23 in 09/10, a decrease is evident when viewing this as a percentage of total learners. The 09/10 cohort included 5.7% of learners from a non-White British background.

- Damar has low numbers of learners who are recorded as having a disability or additional learning/social need. These figures have stayed fairly static in the last three years. For the cohort 09/10, 0.5% of learners recorded a disability and 0.7% recorded an additional learning or social need.
- The number of Damar learners receiving an economic uplift has risen by 37% since 07/08. For cohort 09/10, 45.6% of learners received an uplift.
- Damar's overall WBL success rate in 09/10 was 77.2% and this has risen steadily from 71.3% three years ago. There is a nominal difference between overall success rates between genders of 1.7%. This gap has been significantly reduced from the 8% difference in 07/08. This said, performance of 25+ males is significantly higher than their female counterparts in the most recent cohort. Conversely, in the 16-18 age group, female learners perform better than males. Damar has enjoyed consistently strong success rates for learners aged 25 or over and as a total this age group performs just above the provider average, with 16-18 success rates just below the average. Success rates for learners aged 19-24 are lowest for both males and females. Across provision as a whole, Non White-British learners at Damar contribute to a success rate of 73.9% which is comparable with the provider average. The success rate for learners with a disability and/or ALSN is 60%, although the very small cohort size makes comparisons less meaningful.
- Performance across subject areas is fairly consistent. Team Leading Level 2 and Business and Administration Level 2 are both higher (around 10%) than the provider average and the success rates for Accounts provision is lower (also around 10%).

Action that has been taken in response to this analysis:

- Damar's vision statement is very clearly defined as having equality and diversity at its heart. This is communicated effectively internally through the employee handbook and department guides and externally through the website, marketing materials and learner resources.
- Central to this vision is Damar's robust equality and diversity policy, which has been updated and amended to include all 7 protected characteristics. This policy is communicated to all learners and employers through enrolment and induction materials.
- Damar has set targets in relation to learners with disabilities (including learning difficulties), learners from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who receive a disadvantage uplift. These targets are linked directly to the regional and national comparators, such that Damar's learner base is representative of the community in which it works. These targets have been added to the agenda for the monthly management meeting to ensure that regular monitoring and subsequent action takes place.

- Damar has good disabled access. The premises are welcoming, with posters and other material on display that underline the commitment to equality.
- Damar has developed strong links with organisations that work within these communities. Damar has always enjoyed a good relationship with Connexions in Stockport, but now works effectively with centres across the region, particularly Longsight, Salford and Burnley in order to widen the range of learners against the targets above. In addition Damar has worked with organisations such as Pure Innovations, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].
- Damar has been one of the most consistent users of the web-based vacancy matching service in the Greater Manchester area. Using this service broadens the reach of Damar's delivery, making it more accessible to people who otherwise may not have come across it.
- Investment in Damar's website and marketing literature has allowed the use of inclusive imagery and text which is designed to appeal to the full spectrum of current and future learners and employers. Specific marketing campaigns have positively encouraged applications from learners with specific backgrounds.
- Similarly, Damar has made alterations to the text and imagery in the learner induction workbook. This guide is given to all learners and covers Damar's vision, equality and diversity policy, learner voice and code of conduct (which states the policy for bullying and cyberbullying). A useful contacts section has also been included to offer guidance on issues in all the themes promoted by Every Citizen Matters. An accompanying supervisor guide is given to all employers.
- Damar does not currently employ any full time members of staff from the BME community, although both part-time internal verifiers are. Damar has increased the number of male employees and has an administrator with Down's Syndrome. When recruiting staff, equality and diversity is included in all advertisements and job descriptions.

Results of these actions and conclusions:

- Whilst the gender balance of learners at Damar does not reflect the local or national comparators, it is considered that this is generally representative of the sectors it operates in. However, it is recognised that action can be taken to redress the balance.

- The number of non White-British learners has increased at Damar, although not in proportion with learner numbers as a whole. As such, action needs to be taken to promote an increase in the percentage of BME learners to reflect the local community in Stockport and subsequently Greater Manchester as a whole.
- Damar needs to be proactive in raising the number of learners on programme with a disability.
- The number of learners with ALSN is considered to be inaccurate as the process for recording these needs is not robust enough, resulting in many learners receiving additional support without extra funding. Whilst this does not impact negatively on learners, a more thorough process is needed to enable meaningful analysis of performance.
- Stockport is a relatively affluent and economically active area, although Damar has succeeded in widening its reach in terms of socio-economic background, such that the most recent cohort was more representative of Greater Manchester as a whole.
- Damar's success rates have improved and are above the national average and the gender gap overall has been narrowed successfully. Similarly, achievement gaps between different ethnicities and those learners with a disability are negligible. The identified areas for improvement are 16-18 year old males, females aged 25 and over and the 19-24 age group as a whole.
- Performance in team leading and business and administration is very good, but attention needs to be given to accounts provision to bring it in line with the provider average.

Future plans:

- Damar recognises that it has not historically recorded data on learner's religious beliefs, sexual orientation or transgender status. As such, the option for learners to record this information will be offered by way of a change to the application form. This will allow for analysis to be conducted against all 7 protected characteristics to ensure equality of provision for all.
- Data on recruitment and placement of learners is in its embryonic stage currently. A database of all applications was created in October 2010 and will provide valuable statistics on the demographics of successful and unsuccessful candidates in the future.

- Damar has been able to respond to individual needs in terms of presentation of resources and materials, such as different fonts for learners with dyslexia or providing dictionaries for learners with English as a second language. However, it is recognised that should provision in a specific area grow sufficiently, such resources could be produced as a matter of course.

Judgement:

Damar has made progress on equality and diversity over the past year in order to position and promote it as a central part of the organisation's vision. In doing so, there is now a greater understanding of where gaps exist in terms of provision and achievement and remedial action to date has borne fruit.

Damar understands that implementation of the equality and diversity policy and vision has been staccato at times. There are ways in which the organisation could be more proactive in order to correct this. This said, it is considered that strength lies in Damar's self critique of this area and the action plan which sets out the ability for the organisation to improve.

6.5 How effectively does Damar engage with users to support and promote improvement?

Damar continues to engage with learners and employers effectively through large programme reviews, monthly assessor reviews and the yearly Framework for Excellence Survey. Service level agreements are still used where appropriate and our annual celebration event was held in October 2010.

Key improvements to our engagement with learners include:

- The inception of ONA documents and processes to clearly establish user needs and expectations and systematically plan the review of these expectations regularly.
- The volume of quality calls has increased significantly and the quality of the content improved to enable more meaningful analysis of data.
- Innovative methods, such as a round table employer forum have been used to understand the current challenges and needs of our employer base.
- Damar was awarded the Training Quality Standard accreditation in 2010. The process for this award involved a great deal of interaction with our learners and employers.

- We have added Twitter to our Facebook account and website blog as a way to communicate with learners, although this is still in its infancy and so impact is difficult to establish at present.

Judgement:

Learner engagement is good, but we will continue to improve our approach with developments such as a full learner survey.

6.6 How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?

Damar's approach to self-assessment remains thorough and robust. All members of staff are involved in contributing to its creation and the views of learners and employers form the basis for many judgements. From this assessment, a key list of improvement actions are drawn up, and our progress against those set in our last quality improvement plan demonstrates that the vast majority were completed successfully.

Judgement:

Our self assessment process provides a clear focus and our track record is evidence that this is now an effective tool in improving quality for learners and employers on a continual basis.