DAMAR TRAINING

[Website version – redacted to protect client/commercial confidentiality]

Self Assessment Report

January 2019

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

Damar Training (Damar) is a privately-owned learning provider headquartered in Stockport, Greater Manchester. Apprenticeships account for almost all our provision and to support this we are on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers and have a contract with the Education and Skills Funding Agency. Our main areas of delivery are:

- Business and administration
- Law
- Accountancy
- Customer service
- Management and team leading
- Business travel (travel consultancy)
- As added-value, we also include medical (AMSPAR) and legal content in some apprenticeships.

To complement and enhance our offer, we have established partnerships with a carefully selected group of subcontractors, accounting for around 10% of our apprentice base:

- **The University of Law:**
  Additional knowledge content in legal apprenticeships.
- **The Law Academy:**
  Additional knowledge content in legal apprenticeships.

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- **The Public Relations and Communications Association (PRCA):**
  Higher Apprenticeships in public relations.

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Although based in Greater Manchester, we work with students at employers across the country, with staff based remotely in Yorkshire, the North-East, Midlands, South West and South East. As such, it is appropriate for us to measure ourselves against national demographics rather than local.

Our last SAR highlighted 3 improvement priorities, 2 of which we have made good progress against:

- Standard delivery plans have been developed and rolled-out across all apprenticeship standards, with a positive impact on consistency and quality of delivery. The concept of MPAs has worked well, where used correctly, although there is ongoing work to ensure they are applied robustly across all qualifications. This is crucial in tracking progress against KSBs.

- Development of blended learning has been extended to all programmes to good effect. Across every apprenticeship standard we now me good use of face-to-face, remote 1:1s, classroom sessions and workshops as appropriate to the area of delivery. We are also making more extensive use of technology such as Zoom (videoconferencing and screen sharing) and Damar Open Learning (our bespoke VLE). Whilst there is still work to be done, progress here has been effective.

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The external backdrop for our current year included a 34% drop in apprenticeship starts nationally, several high-profile providers struggling and ongoing challenges in the transition to standards, as EPAOs and other agencies found their feet. Internally, we'd highlighted that success rates were static and too variable between qualifications and that some of our more complex provision had become "messy" and, in some cases, loss-making. Combined, this set the scene for our strategy in 18/19 to concentrate on improvements to our existing provision, rather than growth in other sectors and standards as we had seen in recent years. This includes:

- Focusing on improving efficiency, quality and teamwork.
- Making programmes easier to understand and design, getting the balance right between tailored approach and consistency.
- The need to be more discerning about taking on higher risk delivery, with better link-up between sales activity and delivery capacity.
- The need to monitor apprentices' progress more closely and taking immediate action where they are falling behind.

In summarising these objectives, we have adopted the tag "vowels":

A E Absolute efficiency

I O   Inspected outstanding

U   Unified

Glossary

In this report, a number of abbreviations have been included for frequently used terms as follows:

BA   Business administrator (apprenticeship standard)

BAME Black, Asian and minority ethnic

CSP   Customer service practitioner (apprenticeship standard)

EPA   End-point assessment

EPAO   End-point assessment organisation

IAG   Information, advice and guidance

KSB   Knowledge, skills and behaviours

LLDD   Learner with learning difficulties or disabilities

MPA   Mid-point assessment

OTJ   Off the job training

QA   Quality assurance

SAR   Self-assessment report

1.2 Methodology

Preparation of this report was led by Robin Lindsay (Operations Director) and Lee Clements (Divisional Manager) with the support of the board and senior management team.

Primary research was centered on activity conducted by a working group, which sought and collated findings from staff, students and employers. This was analysed alongside data from ongoing quality assurance procedures, including programme reviews, quality calls, observations of teaching, learning and assessment, formative and summative IQA reports and minutes from weekly, monthly and quarterly meetings.

Secondary data was drawn from published success rate figures, find an apprenticeship website reviews, ESFA employer and student surveys and a variety of articles, such as the GMCA diversity report.

An initial draft was reviewed by the working group, with the board signing-off the final draft. This will be submitted to Ofsted and shared with staff and key stakeholders.

2   Summary of grades

OVERALL GRADE	2, GOOD
Effectiveness of leadership and management	2, GOOD
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2, GOOD
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	2, GOOD
Outcomes for learners	2, GOOD

3   Key actions and our quality improvement plan

Damar's quality improvement plan is a living document, comprising a succinct, focused set of objectives that are reviewed fortnightly by the senior management team in a meeting chaired by a director. All objectives have a clearly defined owner and target date for completion. The most recent version is included here:

[link]

The report highlights many ongoing operational objectives, seen as "business as usual" in meeting the identified areas for improvement. However, the key priorities in driving success are:

- Continued sustainable growth:
  Ensuring we have a range of programmes that are designed and delivered efficiently and that trainer caseloads are financially viable and manageable.

- Rollout of the ▬▬▬ tool:
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- Consistency in the quality of teaching and learning:
  Objective, to be outstanding, by making sure that the very best qualities of trainers, methods, resources and materials are effectively embedded across all programmes, all of the time.

4   Effectiveness of leadership and management

4.1   Grade

Grade 2, GOOD

4.2 Identified strengths

Damar is an ambitious provider with strong, clear values and integrity. The last academic year saw an increase in both starts (16%) and completions (17%), with overall growth in student numbers of 36%. Our successful transition from framework apprenticeships continues, with 9 standards now being delivered. We have continued to strengthen our team, increasing FTE staff by *c.*10% and introducing key new roles, such as Head of Knowledge and Head of HR.

We recognise, though, that as a result of organic growth, some aspects of our provision had become complex, our quality could be more consistent and, as a team, we could be better structured and work more cohesively. A thorough review by the senior management team in spring 2018 identified a small number of key objectives, centred on a "back to basics" approach of activity to support our core purpose of helping businesses and individuals to reach their potential This vision was set out very effectively through our annual summer briefing and reinforced at a series of departmental training sessions and updates. Evidence from the first quarter of 18/19 offer a positive picture in terms of early impact.

We understand the importance of strong leadership and have invested in improving the structure of our team and the remit of individual managers with some success. We have a strong, capable and clearly defined senior management team. Middle managers have benefitted from increased HR support, making processes more robust and adding important scrutiny to decisions. An overhaul of weekly and monthly meetings means that attendees and agendas are more relevant and impactful. We have taken our first cohort through a management development programme, designed and delivered in conjunction with experts in concepts such as resilience, productivity and communication. The programme has been well-received and workshop activities have resulted in solutions to real challenges for the business.

Similarly, we have listened to staff feedback in terms of communication and development. Our monthly development day has been replaced by smaller, team-focused sessions and a quarterly communications day. We have an ongoing plan in place to move all key staff training onto our OpenLearning platform to make it more consistent and accessible. A trial with the delivery team involving a monthly board report has also showed early signs of success and will be rolled-out more widely in the coming year. For the past three years we have conducted an annual staff survey, where colleagues are asked, anonymously, to give their views. Key outcomes are shared with the team and progress against actions arising from the feedback is shared at the quarterly communications days.

Damar continues to work very effectively with key stakeholders to fully understand what our employers and students need and how we can make the best use of apprenticeships for them.

- Employer survey results show that 87% would recommend us and the new Find an Apprenticeship website reviews highlight communication with employers as a significant strength, with 90% rating us as excellent or good. We are highly collaborative in creating programmes for new employers and developing and improving those for existing customers. Recent bespoke management programmes, customer service and business administrator apprenticeships tailored to the needs of legal and medical environments and the identification of niche gaps such as our work with conveyancers are all testament to this.
- SAR working group feedback from our sales team highlights a significant improvement in our ability to qualify out employer interest and tenders that we are not best placed to deliver. We

believe that decisions to say no to work in the last year demonstrates a notable strength and confidence in understanding our core business.

- We play a proactive role in shaping the skills agenda. Some examples locally include supporting various SMBC initiatives and being represented on the GMLPN board, whilst national examples can be seen in our significant contributions to the travel trailblazer and supporting the development of end-point assessments with Pearson and City and Guilds.
- We have strong relationships and clear channels of communication with regulating and funding bodies.
- We continue to spread the reach of our intelligence network, attending updates and events across the country.

Combined, this work has allowed us to design an innovative range of provision tailored to the needs of our students and employers, the sectors and communities we serve, and government priorities.

We are committed to providing students with the highest quality IAG. Our Matrix accreditation was renewed following a successful inspection in April, in which the quality of our team was highlighted as a strength. We have continued to invest in building the capability of our sales and recruitment teams, bringing in broader skills, knowledge and experience from outside of traditional apprenticeship environments. Candidates looking for work receive timely and supportive advice, which prepares them well for interviews. We have had continued success with large, complex recruitment projects such as the one with ████████████████, and we have been pleased with recent outcomes from directly marketing candidates to SMEs.

It remains a strategic priority to create a fully rounded apprenticeship experience for all students, including the development of KSB in relation to maths and English, British values, and equality and diversity. We are determined that this is purposeful and not tokenistic:

- Our new standardised training plans include suggestions in every block of learning for wider discussion of English, maths, British values, and equality and diversity.
- We have recruited an additional functional skills specialist, which has increased our delivery footprint and provided more time for programme development.
- Increased investment in digital content has also been beneficial in improving the quality and range of OpenLearning resources for English and maths.
- A small project to provide functional skills support to an employer provider has challenged our ability to deliver in more innovative ways. Early exam success is encouraging.
- Improvements to initial training for British values and E&D have been effective to some extent. Ongoing "themes of the month" have also been well received by many students and, when questioned, there is a good level of engagement with such topics.

Damar is effective in promoting equality of opportunity and diversity. A GMCA report in 2018 found that "nationally, BAME people are underrepresented within apprenticeships, making up 15.6% of the working age population but just 10.5% of apprentices…national trends are reflected in GM, whereby there are thousands fewer apprentices from BAME backgrounds than would be expected given the diversity of GM's residents. White people account for 88.9% of apprentices, compared to 83.8% of the general population." Through continued work with community groups, better school liaison and specific employer projects, our

student base in 17/18 included 15% BAME people. We have enjoyed similar success with LLDD students, seeing an increase to 11.5%.

Safeguarding practices at Damar continue to be outstanding. Processes are simple but well-understood by all staff and highly effective. Our designated safeguarding lead has a wealth of experience and expertise, supported by further investment in the development of a wider safeguarding team from across the business. Safeguarding is a priority to the senior management team and more complex, serious cases receive swift involvement of directors. Our track record in relation to identifying, reporting and acting upon concerns is exceptional and case study examples since our last SAR continue to demonstrate the speed, care and dedication with which we treat individual cases.

Damar's approach to self-assessment and ongoing plan for quality improvement is more robust than ever. In conducting our annual self-assessment, we appointed leads from across the business to independently investigate specific lines of enquiry, with the findings discussed by the group as a whole. We continue to generate and make good use of feedback from students and employers, in addition to external data. We promote external surveys on student and employer views and value the feedback they provide. However, perhaps more importantly, the formation of a project team in the summer of 2018, which is focused on delivering key quality improvements, has given renewed drive and purpose to our ongoing QIP. Meeting fortnightly, and chaired by a director, the progress and impact of improvements is placed under much greater scrutiny. We believe this provides us with an accurate, honest and deep understanding of our strengths, allows us to set relevant and challenging objectives to address areas for improvement and, crucially, hold ourselves to account in taking action to achieve these objectives.

4.3   Areas for improvement

Sustainable growth is a core objective. We have experienced a disproportionate increase in direct delivery costs (34%) which, in part, can be attributed to inefficient delivery methods and ineffective caseload capacity planning. Work to define and document "standard delivery models" for all apprenticeships is a crucial component in ensuring all trainer caseloads are viable and manageable. Early evidence is encouraging, but this remains a central objective for the business.

Having defined a target operating model, further development of the organisational structure is planned in moving towards this objective. A full review of job descriptions will be completed and launched at the start of 2019. Quarterly communication days will remain in the New Year accompanied by additional staff training content on OpenLearning. Upward reporting throughout the business is still a priority and further support will be provided to managers, and the team as a whole, to this end. Consideration will also be given to a second cohort of colleagues to complete the management development programme.

Quality improvement could be more effective and our approach since summer 2018 has delivered significantly more impact. We feel that maintaining this approach is important in driving quality improvements and holding ourselves to account.

Whilst improvements to the embedding and delivery of wider skills has been thoughtful, the role of British values is not consistently valued by employers. Similarly, a small proportion of students (particularly those for whom an exemption has been applied) do not fully value the inclusion of maths and English content. We believe that better initial IAG to employers and students, a full redesign of our student induction and

further development of materials and resources are important objectives. Better data on students attempting a higher level for functional skills would be beneficial in measuring progress and impact.

Feedback from colleagues has identified that IAG resources for parents are limited and IAG on career progression could be more effective. A similar view was highlighted in our Matrix inspection report, which stated "a small minority of students were unsure where to find information resources…[and] the scope of the IAG service is less clear to employers than to students". This is challenge for our sales and marketing colleagues in the coming year.

Whilst IAG and support for employers and students is good overall, staff and employers concur that, in some cases, conversations throughout the business development, recruitment and delivery stages could be better documented. Whilst improvements to CRM systems will be considered, the quality of conversations is seen to be most important.

5   Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

5.1   Grade
Grade 2, GOOD

5.2   Identified strengths
Damar has a talented and dedicated delivery team and we continue efforts to broaden the skills and experience of our trainers. The transition from apprenticeship frameworks to standards has brought with it a broader syllabus, a greater emphasis on the development of KSB and more stretching requirements from our employers and students. This has challenged thinking around the remit of trainers and our approach to ensuring consistent and high-quality teaching for all students:

- We have upskilled experienced trainers to lead on the delivery of the KSBs that are generic across all subjects, such as time management and communication. This has been particularly well deployed in our accountancy apprenticeships. The impact is twofold. First, it provides students with better support in developing competency in areas that are important, but non-technical. Second, it has allowed us to increase the proportion of time that technical experts spend on knowledge delivery.
- Within individual subject areas, we have pursued further subject specialism, reducing the need for trainers to be all-rounders and improving the quality of teaching to students. Examples include our legal programmes, where all students have access to the same expert webinars for each topic; accountancy programmes, where classes will now commonly move between tutors with specific experience in that subject; and cross-qualification delivery, such as our accountancy tutors delivering finance webinars for customer service and management students.
- The introduction of industry experts to certain qualifications and programmes has succeeded in adding layers of tailoring and quality that add significant value to students and employers. Examples include the introduction of the StrengthScope tool by qualified practitioners to some management programmes; relationships with industry experts ███

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████████████████████████ and dovetailing programme content with existing, internal employer training.

Individual training plans are good, particularly for standards, and have benefitted from a fresh view on content as a result of greater flexibility in the syllabus. Programme managers have worked effectively on new methods, content and resources that have been well-received by students. Notable examples include the introduction of more contemporary theorists to management programmes, such as ██████ ████████; extension of blended learning methods across all qualifications; and the use of standardised "assessment briefs" to structure work for students to complete. This contributes to most students being appropriately challenged throughout their apprenticeship. Most plans demonstrate clear links between content, the KSB required for a role and how this can be applied in the workplace.

Training plans for standards are good at planning OTJ for apprentices. We have worked proactively with employers to ensure that they have a good understanding, not just of the requirement for OTJ, but also the value in making that investment in their apprentice.

There are many examples of programmes being tailored particularly effectively in meeting specific student, employer and sector needs. Some successful case studies include the creation of a ████████ ██ ██ ██ ████████████████ In all cases, feedback from students and employers supports the view that these bespoke elements have added value to the core programme.

Most students enjoy their learning. Survey results from the find an apprenticeship website highlight "providing the right training at the right time" and "improving apprentice skills" as strengths and the learner survey shows that 83% of students would recommend Damar. This concurs with SAR working group feedback that found some really good engagement in workshops and through submitted pieces of work. Internal surveys confirm these findings, with student experience, meeting expectations and support from trainer averaging 8/10.

In general, feedback is effective and leads to development and improvement. Most students and employers value the review process and engage positively in discussions. Reviews, reflective accounts and unit summaries allow effective reflection on the KSBs that a student has developed. Most employers (88% on Ofsted Employer View) feel well-informed and the find an apprenticeship survey lists communication with employers as the most common strength highlighted by respondents.

Trainers make accurate judgements in assessing student progress. MPAs are effective and the inclusion of on-programme qualifications such as CILEx, ILM and AAT diplomas work well to prepare students for end-point assessment.

Work set is challenging to most students. The roll-out of standard training plans and activity briefs across all programmes has added consistency. The inclusion of industry experts, as outlined above, provides effective stretch to these qualifications. SAR working groups found that in some qualifications, particularly law and management, students are effectively encouraged to research information away from taught sessions.

Staff are committed to promoting equality of opportunity and diversity. Training plans make helpful suggestions as to where core content could be extended to E&D and "themes of the month" are, in the main, used well by trainers to generate purposeful discussion. Where necessary, reasonable adjustments are made effectively to cater for individual needs. Examples of discrimination are incredibly rare, but should such a situation arise, it is tackled swiftly and proactively.

Development of maths and English skills are good in general. Aside from direct functional skills activity, trainers tackle most inaccuracies in student work. Training plans have good links to potential extension activities for literacy and numeracy. There are some good examples of best practice here, but greater consistency is needed across all programmes.

5.3   Areas for improvement

Consistency in the quality of teaching and learning is seen as key in our ambition to be outstanding. Nearly 1/5 of students wouldn't recommend Damar and we recognise the importance of reducing this proportion. We believe that the quality of teaching and learning experience is a significant factor.

One key area of inconsistency has been in measuring KSBs at the outset and clearly agreeing objectives with employers and apprentices. As outlined above, work on ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and upskilling our team to conduct more detailed diagnostic activity is ongoing at pace as we consider this a high priority. This action will allow for more effective tailoring of programmes (and the use of OTJ) to individual needs, particularly where we have employers and/or apprentices who aren't as engaged as we would like.

Whilst training plans detail options for more able students to complete further reading, and assessment briefs and MPAs provide effective marker posts to identify areas in which students are struggling, these tools are not consistently used to good effect for some students. A significant issue here lies in managers being able to track student progress effectively. In the absence of an effective solution in OneFile, a simpler Excel-based tracker has been created to ensure managers have the data they require to make accurate analysis of progress.

Where students do not attend, are late in submitting work or fail to submit at all, this is not always effectively communicated and challenged. Where programmes involve multiple trainers, communication between colleagues could be improved to provide a clearer, more accurate view on student progress.

Whilst OTJ is well planned for in training plans, work is ongoing with trainers and supervisors to ensure that OTJ activity is being recorded well. Some employers are poor at allocating time to apprentices to complete OTJ activity. Although we are getting better at this, sometimes more robust conversations are required.

Training plans for framework apprenticeships are less effective than the counterpart documents for standards. As we plan to continue delivery of a small number of framework programmes, this must be rectified.

A small proportion of tailored programmes have been less successful. ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. Here, students valued the internal training more than the core apprenticeship and ensuring appropriate time was given to both was challenging. This has highlighted the importance of core content always providing the bedrock for programmes.

Use of OneFile is not always consistent with the level of student and employer engagement. Effective review conversations are not always recorded fully, confirmed by data from missed signature reports. Similarly, reporting of progress through OneFile could be more effective and this is shown in survey data, which lists this as the biggest area for improvement. Internal feedback, from both employers and students, echoes this. A review of OneFile functionality is planned for early 2019.

The quality and consistency of some online content could be improved. Live online workshops for knowledge do not always cater for different learning styles or for those students with additional needs. This could contribute to some issues with punctuality and attendance. Some of our earlier webinar content needs replacing as presentation quality is weaker then we would like (this is scheduled for Spring 2019).

Online class sizes are not sufficiently managed and therefore a small proportion are oversubscribed, which is detrimental to quality. A review of class sizes for online workshops is required to define the optimum size and processes put in place to manage this.

Following our first EPAs, a review of CSP results suggest that trainers may be overstretching students. This could make progression more difficult and may disadvantage less able students and so further moderation of content is planned. EPA evidence for other programmes will also be reviewed as it materialises.

Whilst the care and support for those students with additional needs is broadly effective when delivered, in a small number of cases the need could be identified more quickly. This is particularly pertinent to functional skills provision and can contribute to students missing their target completion date.

Wider welfare issues, such as online safety, are not sufficiently covered in learning resources and training plans. An extension of topics and themes will be completed in 2019.

6   Personal development, behaviour and welfare

6.1   Grade
Grade 2, GOOD

6.2   Identified strengths
A good level of progress has been made in developing the level of reflection from the students to reflect on their own learning within qualifications that have come under the apprenticeship framework. The introduction of standards has pushed this on as students are driven to complete reflective accounts as a standard part of their learning. The reflection from students are an invaluable way for them to review and prepare for MPAs as well as reviewing their successes to date. As we have moved into our very first MPAs, this proving a success with the majority of students receiving a Merit grade for their EPA. Whilst this is encouraging and as discussed previously, further moderation to ensure correct stretch and challenge is required to have tailored courses in line with individual training needs. From student feedback 82% felt they were prepared for the future and had met their initial learning aims.

The use of witness testimony from direct line managers has increased for students undertaking a qualification under the apprenticeship framework. The inclusion as discussed of MPA in on programme learning for the apprenticeship standards has also encouraged stronger relationships with employers. The relationship not only confirms a student's ability and contribution, but to also agree this contribution with the student that they are achieving both the standard required and the standard required to be an effective member of the team and contributing to the wider business. As we have identified our overall success rate is 75% and our focus is to increase this back up to 80% initially.

Engaging learners to develop knowledge is through the use of Damar Open Learning and incorporating in some areas sector specialists to impart this knowledge via live tutorial. Attendance to these sessions as well as workplace sessions are mandatory in line with the training plan. This had proved challenging in some settings and trainers are working with employers to overcome this. We have the ability to track attendance through a number of systems that we work with. Regular attendance to workplace contact is through OneFile and is tracked through quality progress checks. Attendance to knowledge training sessions through Damar Open Learning is tracked through the attendance registers used with Damar Open Learning. There is further work to do to educate the students and the trainers in registering attendance through the systems to report effectively on. Developments in the systems has enabled trainer to be able to view attendance and challenge more effectively where they feel attendance is an issue to a training course. Students who consistently attend the taught sessions on the Damar OpenLearning platform are more successful than those whose attendance is patchy. Ensuring attendance and following up quickly with employers and apprentices where there are issues is therefore a priority.

Students are inducted to training with Damar and in all cases have a company induction to their place of work separately. What is testament to the students we work with is that we have no examples where students have behaved erratically or out of the acceptable parameters to voice concerns or question decisions where they feel they would like clarification. One example where this could have been the case was a recent group discussion on British Values where a variety of views had to be taken into account. The trainer was facilitating the discussion which ended in the group having a deeper understanding of a variety of beliefs and acceptance of other's viewpoints. Other discussions that have taken place have been between students and their line managers when they would like to question us about our approach or feedback on an area of delivery. Again, all conversations and approaches from our student base have been done so in line with the organisation they are employed with and following the channels as explained at the launch visit within learner voice.

Within the student induction they are introduced to the Prevent and Safeguarding policies and what they mean for the student. Through the theme of the month these are picked in topics for the trainer and the student to work with. This enables the themes to be topical to current affairs as well as promoting British Values, building awareness of the prevent strategy and our commitment to safeguarding. We do see varying engagement with the research topics we put in place, with some students reflecting and researching the topic, where some students will comment through the review process. At all stages in the learning journey and as part of the review process the student and trainer are prompted to reflect on wider topics that have been addressed outside of the core qualification topic.

6.3 Areas for improvement

Consistency is the theme as we emerge from the first 2 years of apprenticeship standards and bringing into line the approach to personal development, behavior and welfare. We have always had in place many extensions to our deliver that support wider topics to develop students, however cementing this across all learning is the success we will see from consistency.

We have identified a new approach to the induction of the students to Damar Training, and as such we plan to roll this out by the end of February 2019. With the introduction of the launch visit to review and individualise training plans with the students this gives a good opportunity to induct students to Damar Training as an organisation as well as their learning journey in its entirety. Whilst many of the wider topics are discussed and reviewed with students, there is a lack of evidence to support the learning from this activity. Utilising the Damar OpenLearning system with current information advice and guidance will support a knowledge check at the end of the induction to gauge: 1, a student's understanding and 2, that they have undertaken the training, so will be ready not only to learn about their specific subject, but also about the wider topics that will develop knowledge skills and behaviors that are transferable within the workplace.

Our use of Damar OpenLearning has developed within all of our apprenticeship standards and as such the introduction of programme managers will see this develop further into the pivotal learning portal for our students to develop knowledge. Better use of the system to track mandatory attendance is required to allow the work place trainer to challenge the student where attendance becomes a concern. Using the information from knowledge checks where knowledge-based tutors lead on delivery to inform effective tutorials is another area for development.

7 Outcomes for learners

7.1 Grade

Grade 2, GOOD

7.2 Identified strengths

Most students make good progress from their starting points. The proportion of students off-FEED (i.e. beyond their expected completion date) peaked at 15% but was successfully reduced to 7% by the end of 17/18. This peak is a contributory factor in the overall timely success rate lagging around 18% behind the overall rate. Many of these students were completing QCF framework qualifications, but early evidence for those on standards shows that this figure is consistent with the proportion passing through the gateway on time. The biggest single reason for any delay in passing gateway has been lack of EPAO readiness (particularly for travel and conveyancing). Whilst this may impact timeliness for 18/19, we are comfortable that it won't impact upon overall rates.

Overall apprenticeship success rates remain good and above the national average, despite a decrease of *c.*3% in 17/18 to 75.3%.

In comparing different groups of students, there is little variation amongst demographic data.

- Gender rates are comparable, with overall rate for females just less than 2.5% higher than males.
- Overall rate for students who are BAME is 2% higher than that for white-British. Any significant deviation for specific ethnic groups is primarily a result of very low cohort numbers.
- Those students declared LLDD have a success rate just 2% lower than those without.
- There is just 2.5% difference between students aged 16-18 and their older counterparts (75.5% versus 78%).

Analysis of different qualifications highlights much greater differences between groups of students:

- Success rates for Damar's longstanding provision remain strong at 81% overall. This is consistent with performance over the last 5 years and includes notable success for level 3 business and administration (83%), customer service (87%) and level 2 accountancy (96%). ███ Amongst our newer qualifications, success rates are generally lower ████████ ██
- Generally, performance is stronger on lower level qualifications; level 2 averaging at 80% versus 67% at level 3.
- Work to improve performance in higher level programmes has been effective, confirmed by an overall success rate of 76%, with a particularly strong rate of 83% for level 5 management.

Success of subcontracted provision is broadly inline with or above Damar's centre average. Again, the challenge here is shown in the difference between more well-established programmes (for example, ██

Only a small number of students were scheduled to complete a new apprenticeship standard in 17/18, although early rates are encouraging into 18/19. A group of fledgling customer service practitioner apprentices (7 in total) were given incorrect funding end dates, resulting in a published rate of 0%. However, this group has now completed and subsequent success rates in 18/19 have been high, with a significant proportion of distinctions.

The standard of student work is generally good and with the advent of grade boundaries for apprenticeship standards there is compelling anecdotal evidence to suggest that many students are driven to achieve distinction. This is supported by early EPA evidence, with Damar students receiving distinctions on customer service, management and accountancy programmes.

Direct progression from one apprenticeship to another is relatively low, with the exception of accountancy programmes where most students commit to transitioning through from level 2 to level 4. Changes to funding rules and the nature of new apprenticeship standards make immediate progression less common for our other qualifications. However, there are good examples of Damar alumni returning to develop new skills as their career progresses.

Progression in terms of the KSB required to stay and progress at work are very good. A high proportion (96%) remain in full-time employment at the end of their apprenticeship. Case study examples of career development include:

- Greater Manchester Police, where many apprentices have progressed to supervise and mentor new apprentices as they arrive.

- An apprentice with a significant disability, who's progression in his role with the NHS has seen him singled out as a face of the Government's "Fire It Up" campaign.

7.3 Areas for improvement

The challenge set out at our last Ofsted inspection and an ongoing theme in Damar's previous two SARs has been balancing success rates with significant changes to the shape of our provision. Namely:

- The development of more complex qualifications, with a higher degree of technical knowledge content. Such apprenticeships generally require students to remain on programme for longer, increasing the risk that they leave employment. Developing qualifications like this presents similar challenges to a new start-up business; new sectors, employers and trainers, many of whom have limited prior experience of apprenticeships.
- A wider geographical spread of delivery and a necessary transition to a blended learning approach. It takes time to get the technology and methodology right and ensure that they are used and applied most effectively.
- A broader spectrum of learning needs, with programmes specifically targeted to underrepresented groups, such as those who have been in receipt of free school meals, looked after children, communities with high levels of social deprivation or non-graduate entry routes to professional occupations. In all cases, more complex analysis of individual learning gaps is required.
- The changing role of trainers. The variety of KSBs within our range of apprenticeship standards demands a much broader range of experience and skills for delivery staff. In most cases, it's no longer possible for a single trainer to cover the demands of an entire syllabus. Melding input from different trainers, some of whom will never meet the apprentice face-to-face, is challenging.

Whilst we are disappointed to see an overall dip in success rates, we are comfortable that we understand the reasons for this, as outlined above. Furthermore, we believe this is justifiable in shaping our provision to meet the needs of our customers. We have a clear strategy to support an upward trend towards 80%, with greater consistency between groups of students, including:

- Rollout of the Profiler tool in the first part of 2019 will significantly improve the accuracy with which we identify individual learning gaps. This will provide an opportunity for teaching and learning to be more effectively tailored to specific needs.
- The appointment of a Head of Knowledge and continued development of the Programme Manager role in driving the quality of methods, resources and materials to be outstanding.
- A review of the roles played by different trainers in best meeting the KSBs of all programmes. This is planned for the first half of 2019 and will be led by the Operations Director.
- More sophisticated tracking of student progress throughout their on-programme learning. Students and employers have provided feedback that they would benefit from a percentage tracker linked to ongoing activity, as is evident for QCF frameworks. Work here is underway, with an interim solution linked to MPAs. We believe this will also have a positive impact on timely success rates.
- Continuous improvement of management support for trainers. Reworking of teams has allowed for a narrower geographical spread within our teams and a revamped QA strategy has been

launched in December 2018. This closer support has been extended to subcontractors, with team managers adopting partner providers as an additional "team member".