

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Asset Training & Consultancy Limited**

21 May 2001



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

## Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

- one third or more of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas and New Deal options are judged less than satisfactory, or
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

## SUMMARY

### The provider

Asset Training & Consultancy Limited (Asset) is a private training company based in Bootle, Merseyside. It works with organisations in Liverpool, Manchester and London to provide training for their employees. Asset currently trains 18 advanced modern apprentices and 101 foundation modern apprentices. Twenty six apprentices are employed in London and the remainder are employed in the northwest of England. Training is provided in the occupational areas of manufacturing, business administration and retailing and customer services. The company provides training for New Deal clients itself, and as a subcontractor to local units of delivery. At the time of inspection, the company had seven New Deal clients on options.

### Overall judgement

The overall quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. The quality of work-based training is good and the training provided for New Deal clients is satisfactory. The leadership and management of Asset are satisfactory.

### Work-based learning for young people

Work-based training for young people is good in all occupational areas. Retention rates are high. The achievement rates of apprentices in manufacturing and administration are good and in other areas they are improving steadily. Assessment practice is rigorous and learners are set and meet demanding targets. Learners receive help and support in the workplace from work-based assessors, line managers and occupationally experienced staff from Asset Training. The company has made key skills training an effective and integral part of NVO programmes. Apprentices' prior learning and experience are recognised and accredited. Arrangements for the initial assessment of apprentices are not satisfactory. Apprentices' needs for help with basic skills are not identified and met. Training in the workplace is poorly planned and is not properly recorded. Learners' progress reviews are often not carried out well and do not usually involve discussion between workplace supervisors, learners and assessors.

### New Deal

Five New Deal clients were following the full-time education and training option and were working towards qualifications in information technology, and two clients were following the employment option and were working towards qualifications in manufacturing. All clients received sound training from enthusiastic staff. They receive comprehensive occupational training from enthusiastic staff. There is,

however, no planned programme of training to help clients improve their literacy and numeracy skills. There are insufficient work placements for clients working towards information technology qualifications, and some clients have to gather evidence of the acquisition of skills in a simulated, rather than actual, workplace. Few clients progress to employment from the full-time education and training option. The main focus of the programme is on training rather than the securing of employment.

### Leadership and management

The leadership and management of Asset are satisfactory. Asset works effectively with learners and employers to provide flexibly arranged training to meet their needs. Communications within Asset are good. Staff are well motivated and enthusiastic. Their training needs are met and these are identified through a well-managed appraisal process. Management information systems do not meet the growing needs of the company, and do not facilitate the effective analysis of learners' progress. The company emphasises the importance of equal opportunities in its internal and external communications. The company has not taken any specific action to recruit learners from groups under-represented on training programmes and options. There are, however, inadequate arrangements for collecting the views of employers and for reporting the progress of learners to employers. Target-setting is ineffective.

### GRADES

Information & communications technology	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal	3

Manufacturing	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal	Not graded

Business administration	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal	Not graded

## ASSET TRAINING & CONSULTANCY LIMITED

<b>Retailing &amp; customer service</b>	<b>2</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2
New Deal	Not graded

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	3

### KEY STRENGTHS

- effective accreditation of prior learning
- rigorous assessment practice
- success in meeting demanding assessment targets
- effective integration of key skills training with occupational training
- high retention rates across all programme areas
- good internal communications
- flexibly arranged training programmes

### KEY WEAKNESSES

- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress
- insufficient planning and recording of training
- poor initial assessment process
- inadequate management information systems
- no monitoring of employers' promotion of equal opportunities
- no training to help learners improve their basic skills

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more staff training in basic skills
- better monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data
- closer involvement of employers and supervisors in learners' progress reviews
- better recording and cross-referencing of evidence by learners
- more checking of learners' understanding of induction information
- better internal verification procedures

## THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. Asset Training & Consultancy Limited (Asset) was founded in 1996. It initially operated as a computer centre for unemployed learners in Bootle and employed two staff. Asset now employs 20 permanent staff and two part-time consultants. It has extended its operations to include more government-funded training programmes and some commercial work. Asset has a training centre in Bootle, where it also has separate administrative premises. It was recognised as an Investor in People in May 2000.

2. Asset holds contracts with Merseyside and West London Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC) for the provision of youth training in Merseyside, Manchester and London. It works with four further education colleges in one area to provide training to learners over the age of 25. All the youth trainees are employed. Most of their training and assessment is carried out at their workplaces. Asset has 101 foundation modern apprentices and 18 advanced modern apprentices, working towards qualifications in engineering, technology and manufacturing; business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation and information and communications technology. Twenty-eight learners are based in London and the remainder are in the Northwest of England. Asset has a contract with the Employment Service for seven New Deal clients in Liverpool on the full-time education and training option. It also has subcontracting arrangements to offer training to a further 35 New Deal clients within the Liverpool and Sefton New Deal units of delivery.

3. Unemployment in Merseyside is high. In April 2001, the unemployment rate in Merseyside was 7 per cent, compared with the rates of 3.3 per cent nationally, 3.9 per cent in Northwest England, 3.5 per cent in Greater Manchester and 3.3 per cent in London. Participation in education and training among school leavers is low in all three regions. In 2000, 63 per cent of young people aged 16 in Liverpool and 60 per cent of those in Manchester, progressed to education or training compared with the national average of 69 per cent. The programmes offered by Asset reflect the types of work available in Merseyside, Manchester and West London. In all these areas, a high percentage of the workforce is employed in retailing, customer services and in business service industries. In Merseyside, where most of Asset's manufacturing trainees are employed, these businesses account for over 10 per cent of employers.

4. In 2000, the proportions of 16-year olds obtaining five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above in Liverpool, Greater Manchester and London were 35.3 per cent, 30.3 per cent, and 47 per cent respectively, compared with 49.2 per cent nationally. The 1991 census showed that the proportions of persons from minority ethnic groups in Liverpool and Greater Manchester were 3.8 per cent and 5.9 per cent, respectively, compared with 20.2 per cent in London, 3.7 per cent in the Northeast, and 6.2 per cent nationally.

## THE INSPECTION

5. A team of seven inspectors spent a total of 28 days with Asset in May 2001. They visited trainees and their employers in all of the regions covered by the company. They interviewed 56 learners, company staff and supervisors, line managers and training managers at 19 workplaces. Inspectors observed training, assessment and review sessions. They examined a range of documents including learners' portfolios of evidence, learners' records, Asset's plans, records, policies and procedures and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors studied Asset's self-assessment report which had been prepared in March 2001 for the inspection, following consultation with all staff.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Information & communications technology	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Manufacturing	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Retailing & customer service	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>7</b>



## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Information & communications technology

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	12	2
New Deal	5	3

6. Seventeen learners were working towards information technology qualifications. Ten were foundation modern apprentices working towards an NVQ at level 2 and two were advanced modern apprentices, one of whom was working towards an NVQ at level 2 and the other three were working towards an NVQ at level 3. Foundation and advanced modern apprentices were all working towards certification in key skills. There were five New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option and they were working towards NVQs. All foundation and advanced modern apprentices are full-time employees working at different branches of a company in central London. These modern apprentices are assessed by members of the company's staff who are qualified assessors. All New Deal clients are unemployed and are receiving training at the company's premises in Bootle. Internal verification is carried out in both London and Bootle by an internal verifier based in Bootle. In its self-assessment report, the company provided one grade for the areas of administration and information technology. The company identified three weaknesses but no strengths. Inspectors agreed with two of the weaknesses. The third weakness had been rectified by the time of the inspection. Inspectors found strengths and some additional weaknesses and awarded a grade higher than that given in the self-assessment report.

New Deal										
New Deal (18-24)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					6		13		19	100
Still in training					0	0	0	0	5	26
Gained job and/or planned learning completed					2	33	0	0	1	5
Gained job					0	0	0	0	0	0
Planned learning completed					4	67	8	62	9	47

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started									10	100
Still in training									10	100
FMA framework completed										
NVQ level 2 completed									4	40

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started									2	100
Still in training									2	100
AMA framework completed										
NVQ level 2 completed									1	50
NVQ level 3 completed										

## STRENGTHS

- excellent and demanding work environment for learners
- rigorous assessment of NVQs for modern apprentices
- demanding targets for learners
- good additional training for learners
- good support for learners
- good retention rates

## WEAKNESSES

- no planned training for modern apprentices
- failure to make key skills training an integral part of learning
- no training to help learners improve their basic skills
- insufficient work placement opportunities for New Deal clients
- failure of some New Deal clients to obtain jobs

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reproduction of some training materials

7. Learners in London work with modern computer systems. This gives them excellent opportunities to learn in a demanding environment where priority is given to meeting customer demands. The computers are connected by networks and can produce quality reprographic work. Large colour photocopiers and machines for duplicating large architectural plans are also used. Learners become expert in using a variety of computer software including that for good desktop publishing, graphic and photographic manipulation. Their teamwork is excellent. Clients on the New Deal receive good training from enthusiastic trainers. They learn to build, test and operate computers to a high standard. Some then experience real commercial pressure by servicing and repairing computers brought in by customers of Asset Training's sister company. The others learn how to use computers for word processing, databases, spreadsheets and presentations.

8. Assessment in London is well planned and carried out efficiently. Portfolios are of a high standard with a variety of evidence including witness testimony from supportive workplace managers. The assessor and learner work together to cross-reference evidence and ensure that the NVQ requisite standards are met. Learners have a clear understanding of the assessment process. They are guided and motivated by competent staff to gather relevant evidence for their qualifications. Learners are keen to progress rapidly towards achieving their NVQs and, where appropriate, key skills qualifications. Asset has a good target-setting system. Learners attend target-setting sessions on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Demanding targets are agreed and then set out clearly in writing. Copies are given to learners to remind them of what they have to do. Some learners display these targets on their notice boards as a constant reminder.

9. In London, most modern apprentices have opportunities to go on courses offered by their employer, which cover a wide range of computing and customer-related subjects. Many learners take up these courses if they have time. In Liverpool, New Deal clients receive extra tuition in addition to their planned training. The tutors are experts in the use of computers and enable the New Deal clients to improve their computer skills further.

10. All learners feel that they receive good support. Staff are very helpful and sympathetic, going out of their way to help learners. Many learners come back to the training centre after finishing their training to maintain contact with staff. All learners are encouraged to progress, and try for higher level qualifications. Some modern apprentices are considering taking management qualifications. New Deal learners are being encouraged to take up modern apprenticeships. Some learners are working towards two NVQs, one related to the use of a computer, the other on the building and servicing of a computer. They report that in this way they have improved their understanding and are able to offer their customers a better service. Learners are presented with certificates to celebrate their achievements. There is also a learner of the year award presented by a famous person. Employers also give best worker awards to modern apprentices, which are displayed for the general public to see.

11. Retention rates are good. In 2000-01, 50 per cent of New Deal clients and all

modern apprentices completed their training. Four full NVQs and one additional qualification have been achieved so far in 2001. All modern apprentices who began training in the last twelve months are still in training and are progressing well. Overall, in the three years from 1998 to 2001, 66 per cent of New Deal clients stayed in training and achieved the qualification targets set out on their individual learning plans.

12. There is no systematically planned training for modern apprentices. During their initial assessment, their training needs are clearly identified but there is no on- or off-the-job training to meet these. At work, the main employer does not offer systematic training during work except when new equipment is delivered and has to be set up for use. Modern apprentices have achieved NVQs but have fallen behind in their key skills training. Earlier problems with staffing have led to delays in assessing apprentices' key skills. The company has taken steps to improve arrangements for the assessment of key skills. Nevertheless, some modern apprentices are prevented from completing their apprenticeship because they still have to obtain certification in key skills. No training is planned for those found to have numeracy and literacy problems. Initial assessment is not effective in identifying apprentices' weaknesses in basic skills. Such weaknesses are sometimes identified during training or assessment and they are noted on apprentices' individual training plans. However, there are no specially trained staff who can help learners who have problems related to basic skills and no procedures for referring them to appropriate external agencies.

13. With one exception, New Deal clients have work placements with Asset Training and Consultancy. Their workloads on these placements are not comparable with those of learners engaged in the repair of computers on commercial premises, or with the employed modern apprentices in London. These clients do not necessarily gather evidence of their acquisition of skills for their NVQ in the use of information technology at level 2, under pressures comparable with those found in many commercial workplaces. In some instances, the evidence they produce is narrow in range and scope. They have less contact with potential employers than clients who have placements with commercial firms. The number of New Deal clients on the full-time education and training option who gain full-time paid employment is low. In 2001, only one client found a job. In the last three years, only 8 per cent of all those leaving New Deal gained full-time employment. New Deal clients spend a full afternoon each week on jobsearch in the training centre and one day per week looking for work at the local jobcentre. Training for New Deal clients is appropriately planned and training sessions are good. However, some training materials are poorly reproduced and hard to read.

**Manufacturing****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	9	2
New Deal	0	Not graded

14. The company offers training leading to an NVQ in performing manufacturing operations at level 2 and NVQs in food and drink manufacturing at levels 2, 3 and 4. There are eight foundation modern apprentices employed in three companies in Liverpool and a further apprentice is employed in London. All are working towards NVQs at level 2, with seven aiming to obtain an NVQ in performing manufacturing, and two NVQs in food and drink manufacturing operations. In addition, two New Deal clients are working towards units of the NVQ in performing manufacturing operations. All apprentices are recruited directly by their employers. Induction takes place at work in three half-day sessions over a six-week period. Learners are introduced to topics such as health and safety and roles and responsibilities are explained to them. Employers give learners a further induction to their workplace. Learners receive an initial assessment of their key skills. Both assessors and learners hold copies of learners' individual training plans. Assessors plan to visit learners in the workplace every two to three weeks. Some employers offer training which fits in with the apprentices' training programmes. The company provides most of the training in information technology and key skills. Assessment is carried out in the workplace, usually by qualified work-based assessors. The internal verifier co-ordinator plans to visit learners every 12 weeks to review their progress and to monitor their assessments. All learners have mentors in their workplace who give them training and support where necessary. Learners have the opportunity to gain additional qualifications in areas such as food hygiene, health and safety and fork-lift truck operation. The company identified several strengths but no weaknesses in its self-assessment report. Inspectors identified some weaknesses but they awarded the same grade as that given in the self-assessment report.

Trainees' achievements are outlined in the tables below.

New Deal										
New Deal (18-24)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					3		3		2
Still in training					0	0	0	0	2	100
Gained job and/or planned learning completed					3	100	2	67	0	0
Gained job					0	0	0	0	0	0
Planned learning completed					0	0	1	33	0	0

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							12		11
Still in training							0	0	9	82
FMA framework completed							8	67	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed							10	83	11	100

### STRENGTHS

- good achievement and retention rates
- effective accreditation of prior learning
- rigorous assessment practice
- good use of work-based assessors
- good key skills training

### WEAKNESSES

- unsatisfactory monitoring of learners' progress
- ineffective planning of some off-the-job training

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more contact between internal verifier and learners during training
- closer involvement of employers in learners' progress reviews
- more systematic response to the needs of individual learners
- more checking of learners' understanding of induction information
- closer monitoring of on-the-job training to ensure it meets individual needs

15. The proportion of learners who achieve their qualifications in this occupational area is high. Currently, 66 per cent of all apprentices have completed their apprenticeship frameworks. At the time of inspection, all apprentices were close to completing their programmes. Asset has paid particular attention to making sure that learners obtain NVQs at level 2. Currently, the achievement rate is 100 per cent, and many learners obtain this award ahead of schedule. There has been a steady increase in the percentage of young people who remain in training, and currently it is 81 per cent. The company has taken action to increase contact between its training advisers and apprentices and their supervisors. The advisers now visit workplaces every two weeks and the proportion of apprentices who complete their training has increased by 15 per cent.

16. Assessors make good use of learners' previous experience and give recognition to the skills and knowledge learners already have. Many learners are transferred to foundation modern apprenticeships from other training initiatives, such as the New Deal. Assessors hold extensive interviews with apprentices to find out if any of their prior learning and experience can be accredited towards completion of a foundation apprenticeship. The apprentices value this process which aims to ensure they do not have to repeat work towards their NVQ unnecessarily, and they are motivated by it.

17. Assessment practices are rigorous. Asset staff are keen to improve and update their assessment practices. Assessment including assessment by observation is carefully recorded. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, assessors are well qualified and carry out their duties enthusiastically and effectively. They have good working relationships with learners. Assessors visit most workplaces every two to three weeks to carry out assessments at times to suit the requirements of learners. Some apprentices are employed on shiftwork and assessors sometimes visit apprentices on night shifts. A wide variety of assessment methods is used during workplace assessment. Learners are regularly observed completing relevant tasks and are asked relevant questions about their abilities. Recording of evidence in learners' portfolios is also good. Evidence includes signed witness statements. Learners have welcomed more frequent contact with their assessors and say it motivates them. They also confirm that their portfolio-building skills have improved. In most cases, learners have some time each week to work on their portfolios. There is effective liaison between the internal verifier and assessors to ensure learners complete work for their NVQ at level 2. The lead internal verifier deals with any problems each month. The internal verifier personally intervenes

to interview learners when necessary.

18. All employers have work-based assessors. Learners value the guidance given by assessors. The company aims to improve employers' understanding of the NVQ process and assessment in the workplace. Staff from workplaces have volunteered to be trained as assessors by Asset. Some have become qualified assessors and others aim to do so.

19. Priority is given to ensuring that learners acquire key skills through their vocational work. Ways in which they can develop key skills through their activities in the workplace are discussed with the learners at any early stage, and recorded. Some learners begin work on their key skills units during their first week of training. In cases where the nature of their job did not enable learners to develop all the key skills, training advisers have arranged additional training in key skills for them. Assessors often take laptop computers with them when visiting the workplace, in order that learners may use them to generate evidence of their acquisition of key skills. Some learners also give presentations about their work.

20. Some assessors visit learners more regularly than others to carry out reviews of their progress. For example, one employer is visited every two weeks, but visits to another employer have been less regular. Learners at this employer rely heavily on the work-based assessor to provide them with information on their progress towards their qualifications. There is no effective system for checking and recording that learners are acquiring all the skills they need in order to obtain their NVQ units. Learners' acquisition of key skills is not included on assessors' records. Managers are not fully aware of the extent of learners' progress. The reviews of learners' progress are often unstructured, involve little discussion with the learners themselves and do not include the employers. Records of the reviews do not include specification of clear, short-term targets for the learners. When assessors visit learners, they usually complete a record of their visit and this can include information on learners' progress. When it is identified that learners are in need of additional support, they usually receive this promptly and effectively. Such needs are not recorded, however, and it is up to individual assessors to ensure the measures taken to meet them are effective. Learners and employers do not always receive a copy of the record of progress reviews. Little reference is made during the progress reviews to topics and issues covered during induction, such as equal opportunities. In its self-assessment report, the company failed to acknowledge weaknesses in the progress reviews for learners receiving training in manufacturing.

21. On-the-job training is well received by learners. Employers have well-equipped premises and good training facilities. Learners can work on their own using modern manufacturing systems. Responses to questionnaires show that learners are very satisfied with the manufacturing training provision. In some instances, arrangements for off-the-job training are unsatisfactory. Learners have received some training in health and safety and first aid but they have not been given enough off-the-job training in manufacturing. Most off-the-job training programmes are arranged independently by employers to meet their individual requirements. Some learners receive more off-the-job training than others. Some learners have obtained qualifications in manual handling



skills and specific health and safety, but others have not had the opportunity to do so. Learners gain most of their skills on-the-job, and these relate to the job role required of them. Some learners do not acquire a sufficiently wide range of skills to further their career prospects. Action-planning does not always cover the learners' training needs identified during initial assessment.

**Business administration****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	15	2
New Deal	0	Not graded

22. Asset offers training for foundation and advanced modern apprentices in business administration and management. Apprentices work towards NVQs at levels 2 and 3 and key skills. All apprentices are employed in small and medium-sized businesses locally. Apprentices can join the programme at any time and are referred to the company by their employers. All apprentices have initial assessments of their vocational and key skills. Induction is carried out in the workplace. The training is planned so apprentices complete their apprenticeship in 12 months. Asset has five foundation modern apprentices and three advanced modern apprentices in administration and three in management. Apprentices work towards key skills certification throughout their training. Assessors visit apprentices every two weeks to carry out assessment in the workplace and every 12 weeks to review apprentices' progress. Apprentices receive off-the-job training either at Asset's training centre or at work. Staff have relevant vocational experience and appropriate qualifications. Most of the strengths and weaknesses stated in the self-assessment report related to information technology, which has been inspected as a separate occupational area. Inspectors identified strengths in this area that the company had failed to recognise and awarded a higher grade than that given in the self-assessment report.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started					3		1		10
Still in training					0	0	0	0	5	50
FMA framework completed					3	100	1	100	5	50
NVQ level 2 completed					3	100	1	100	5	50

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							5		10
Still in training							4	80	6	60
AMA framework completed							1	20	4	40
NVQ level 2 completed							0	0	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed							1	20	4	40

## STRENGTHS

- success of apprentices in meeting demanding targets
- effectiveness of learning in furthering apprentices' personal development
- excellent achievement and retention rates

## WEAKNESSES

- insufficient planning and recording of training

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording and cross-referencing of evidence by apprentices
- closer involvement of employers and supervisors in apprentices' progress reviews

23. Assessment is rigorous and well-managed. Apprentices make good progress throughout their apprenticeship. Apprentices have up to 12 months to complete their apprenticeships but many complete it in less time than this. The average time taken to complete an apprenticeship is between eight and nine months. Apprentices who have not completed their apprenticeship within 12 months are closely supervised until they do so. Qualifications which apprentices have already achieved, their previous work experience and other relevant experience are taken into account to ensure they do not repeat work. An analysis is made of the skills apprentices have to use in their jobs. Checks are also made on whether their employers can provide apprentices with a sufficiently broad range of experience to enable them to demonstrate all the requisite competencies for their NVQ. All apprentices are working towards an appropriate level of qualification. Assessors visit apprentices in the workplace every two weeks on average. During the visits, apprentices identify the evidence they will gather. Apprentices and their assessors discuss and agree realistic targets for work to be completed between visits. A detailed list of tasks to be undertaken and items of evidence required is drawn up. If apprentices identify something they do not understand, assessors spend time explaining it to them. If apprentices do not have access to computers in the workplace, assessors bring laptop computers to teach them information technology skills. Apprentices are given feedback on their progress and any weaknesses in their performance. Assessors observe apprentices working and record what they have seen, cross-referencing evidence to more than one unit of the qualification where possible. Apprentices are not given enough encouragement to take responsibility for cross-referencing evidence themselves. Apprentices contact Asset if they want an assessor to visit earlier than planned. They are able to contact assessors between visits by telephone if they need advice on any aspect of their qualification. Key skills training is carried out as an integral part of vocational training. Apprentices carry out key skills assignments as part of their work for the NVQ.

24. All apprentices develop their knowledge and skills throughout their time in training. They know that it is important for them to increase their self-confidence, improve their communication skills and develop the ability to work on their own. All apprentices have improved their information technology skills or learned new skills to use in the workplace. Most apprentices have found the level of their work demanding. Staff are all well qualified in their vocational area and are able to pass on an in-depth knowledge of their subject. The relationship between assessors and apprentices is good. Employers encourage apprentices and take an active interest in their progress, allowing them to work in different departments to help them develop a wide range of skills. Many employers ensure that apprentices receive coaching in the workplace where required and some provide them with a good range of specialist courses and learning opportunities. Apprentices understand how their job roles and responsibilities relate to the NVQ standards and are encouraged by employers to take on new responsibilities in the workplace as their knowledge and confidence grows. The work in portfolios is of a high standard and portfolios contain a wide range of evidence apprentices have gathered through their tasks in the workplace. Statements from supervisors, employers and colleagues are used as evidence of apprentices' skills. Many apprentices go on to work towards higher level qualifications and some have been promoted to supervisory level jobs.

25. All apprentices have completed their training successfully. Fourteen foundation apprentices in administration have been recruited to the programme and nine have completed the apprenticeship framework. The remaining five are still on their programme. Four trainees have been recruited to the advanced apprenticeship in administration in the current year. One has completed the apprenticeship and three are still in training. Since 1999, there have been 11 recruits to the advanced apprenticeship in management. Of these, three have completed their apprenticeship frameworks and the remainder are still in training.

26. Training is not planned systematically. Individual training plans specify the NVQ units to be covered and the dates by which they must be completed. They are not updated or amended to take account of the actual completion dates. Learners' needs in terms of personal development are not entered on the individual training plans. Apprentices do not have detailed action plans to chart their progress towards their achievement of qualifications unit by unit. There is little discussion with employers or supervisors on ways of ensuring that training in the workplace meets the needs of individual apprentices. Most employers provide training in some instances, but they do so reluctantly. Apprentices are not always able to attend the off-the-job training they need. Specific dates for attendance at off-the-job training are not routinely agreed with the apprentices, or recorded. Apprentices often do not have access to distance-learning material or other learning aids to work from if off-the-job training is not available to them. Asset's assessors often give individual tuition to apprentices when they visit the workplace, but details of this usually go unrecorded. When apprentices are unsure of something, they usually seek help from a colleague in the workplace. Supervisors do not usually take part in the 12-weekly reviews of apprentices' progress, although they are

always informed about their outcome.

**Retailing & customer service****Grade 2**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	87	2
New Deal	0	Not graded

27. At the time of inspection, there were 87 apprentices in this occupational area, most of whom were working towards qualifications in customer service at NVQ levels 2 or 3. There were 10 advanced modern apprentices in customer service. Of the remaining apprentices, 67 were foundation modern apprentices in customer service, and 10 were foundation apprentices in warehousing. There have been no recruits to the training programme in retailing. The number of people joining customer service training has been increasing over the last three years. Apprentices are recruited to these programmes by referral from their employers or as a result of Asset's marketing activities to employers. All the apprentices in this sector are employed, and most receive their training at work. Apprentices are employed in a variety of workplaces, including a regional retailing organisation, an independent beauty salon and a large food manufacturer. At the start of their training, apprentices are visited in the workplace by their assessor from Asset. During the first two to three visits, apprentices are given information about the training. Their aims and previous experience are explored and individual training plans are drawn up for them. On-the-job training is administered by workplace supervisors and covers topics which are relevant to the apprentices' jobs. For example, training covers computer systems, dealing with reception duties and driving heavy plant vehicles. Some apprentices have off-the-job training if it is available through their employer. For example, some apprentices in a retailing organisation have recently received training in housekeeping standards. Asset provides some off-the-job training for apprentices working towards the key skills unit in information technology, if they are unable to develop information technology skills at work. Training is given at the apprentice's workplace by an Asset trainer, or apprentices can go to Asset's information technology training centre to complete this unit. Apprentices are visited in the workplace by their assessor every two to three weeks, and receive formal reviews of their progress every three months. Fourteen members of staff from the company provide training. All are qualified assessors and visit the workplaces regularly to assess the apprentices. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by Asset in its self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and one additional weakness during the inspection and noted that one weakness in the self-assessment report had been satisfactorily addressed. They agreed with the grade awarded by the company.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					72		97		70	100
Still in training					0	0	0	0	6	9
FMA framework completed					44	61	34	35	41	59
NVQ level 2 completed					50	69	49	51	51	73

Work-based learning for young people										
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)										
	1996-97		1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number that started					12		3		11	100
Still in training					0	0	0	0	10	91
AMA framework completed					3	25	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed					2	17	1	33	7	64
NVQ level 3 completed					5	42	1	33	0	0

## STRENGTHS

- rigorous assessment practice
- extensive range of evidence in portfolios
- particularly well-resourced training programmes
- good short-term action-planning
- effective recognition of apprentices' prior achievements
- good retention rates

## WEAKNESSES

- inadequate identification of apprentices' needs
- poor process for reviewing apprentices' progress

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more cross-referencing of evidence to NVQ units by apprentices
- better recording of training activity
- better induction

28. As the company recognises in its self-assessment report, assessment is particularly thorough. There are comprehensive records detailing the observations made by

assessors and the extent of background knowledge apprentices have acquired. When planning assessment, assessors take the nature of the apprentices' jobs into account and the length of time apprentices have been on their programme. For example, at the beginning of training, evidence of apprentices' competencies is gathered through observation of the apprentices carrying out everyday activities in the workplace. This is referenced to several NVQ units. The assessor then sets the apprentices specific tasks in order that they may fill any gaps in their evidence. Apprentices receive assessment in key skills from the outset, as an integral part of their assessment towards the NVQ. Apprentices receive feedback from the assessor after each assessment, and records of assessments are kept by the apprentices in their portfolios. Most assessors complete charts showing what evidence has been presented and how it meets the NVQ requirements. Apprentices are not encouraged, however, to complete these charts themselves and monitor their own progress. Arrangements for the assessment of the key skills of communication and application of number below level three are not effective. The company recognises that some of its initial assessment materials are inappropriate.

29. Apprentices have well-structured portfolios containing a broad range of evidence. The variety of evidence in portfolios is impressive. In addition to records of observation and witness testimonies, there are records of discussions at work, photographs, evidence of work carried out in the workplace, and apprentices' answers to written questions. The evidence reflects each apprentice's workplace and job. In many cases, apprentices carry out projects at work which benefit their employers, in addition to providing evidence of their acquisition of NVQ competencies. For example, one apprentice is conducting research into causes of shrinkage relating to deliveries and another has researched customers' views about the efficiency of checkout systems.

30. Training resources are good. In addition to the 14 trainers and assessors, there are internal verifiers, a contracts manager, and a business partner, all of whom are qualified assessors. Every member of this team has appropriate occupational experience, and in cases, assessors have over 20 years' experience in their field. Six members of the team hold recognised teaching or training qualifications, and some of the others are currently working towards NVQ units in training.

31. Apprentices carry out good, short-term action-planning. At every visit, the assessor and apprentice agree an action plan which states specific work to be done, with deadlines for its completion. All apprentices know what their short-term targets are. Workplace supervisors, however, are not involved in action-planning and are given a copy of the action plan itself.

32. When individual training plans are drawn up, assessors identify any qualifications held by apprentices which may relate to their current training. For example, many apprentices have previously achieved qualifications in information technology or retailing. Staff are thorough in their accreditation of prior learning and make every effort to ensure apprentices do not repeat work unnecessarily.

33. Asset Training has taken action to improve retention rates. In the last contract year



before inspection, 80 per cent of foundation modern apprentices and 90 per cent of advanced modern apprentices were still on their programme. The contract manager has a clear responsibility for ensuring that apprentices remain in training. Sixty-four per cent of advanced modern apprentices who began their training in the last contract year have achieved an NVQ at level 2. The proportion of foundation modern apprentices who carry out their individual training plan in full is increasing and in the last contract year, 58 per cent did so.

34. In its self-assessment report, the company did not acknowledge that there is no systematic process to ensure that apprentices' training and additional support needs are routinely identified and met. The initial assessment process is not effective as a means of identifying such needs. Apprentices are asked to identify their own training needs by responding to a questionnaire. They seldom seek help from their workplace supervisor when framing answers to this. The company does not draw up any plan to show how any needs the apprentices identify will be met. Staff respond to apprentices' needs as they arise throughout the programme. In a few instances, apprentices had not replied to this questionnaire after four months on their programme.

35. Asset staff provide good personal support for apprentices. For example, when necessary assessors visit apprentices outside normal office hours to conduct assessments. There is no systematic process for identifying apprentices' needs for additional learning support. Individual training plans lack detail about any learning support apprentices will receive. Apprentices are given help in developing information technology skills, but this is neither planned systematically, nor recorded. The targets set for apprentices are not sufficiently differentiated to take account of the aptitude, experience or previous attainments of individuals.

36. Reviews of apprentices' progress are carried out every three months. Discussion in reviews focuses on the apprentices' progress towards achievement of the NVQ and key skills certification, and on any problems the apprentices have encountered. Aspects of the process for carrying out reviews are unsatisfactory. The form used for recording the outcomes of reviews is inadequate and it does not allow for comments on training and the apprentices' personal development. Workplace supervisors are not involved in the reviews. Apprentices are not set clear targets during the reviews. Some assessors invite apprentices to write comments on the progress review form, but others do not. In its self-assessment report, the company acknowledged that there are weaknesses in the review process. Some progress has been made in rectifying these and staff have held discussions on good practice in carrying out apprentices' progress reviews.

37. A broad range of on-the-job training takes place, and in some cases, apprentices also attend off-the-job training provided by their employer. There is no formal recording or monitoring of any training activity which takes place. Similarly, there are no records of the one-to-one coaching assessors give apprentices.

38. Induction is currently satisfactory. Induction takes place over a number of weeks or months, in clearly defined stages. Apprentices are given plenty of information about the

company's responsibilities towards them, but little emphasis is placed upon their responsibilities to the company. Apprentices' understanding of information they receive is checked at the end of the induction process but not during it.

#### Good Practice

*Asset Training has produced a series of printed forms for use by workplace supervisors to record their witness testimonies. There is a separate form for each element of the NVQ which gives guidance about the points to be covered by the witness testimony. Witnesses make their comments on the form as appropriate, and show how their statements relate to the NVQ standards. The guidance provided helps the witnesses to make clear and detailed comments.*

**LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT****Grade 3**

39. Asset is a private company managed by its three partners. It has contracts with colleges and Local Learning and Skills Councils (LLSCs) in Merseyside, Manchester and London. There are now 16 full-time staff in addition to the partners, plus three part-time training consultants. Asset operates an information technology training centre in Bootle. Most staff provide training and assessment in the workplace. It has an equal opportunities policy which has been recently updated, as have policies and procedures about quality assurance. The company began self-assessment in 1999 and produced its third self-assessment report in February 2001. The self-assessment report described several strengths and weaknesses with which inspectors agreed. They identified further strengths and weaknesses.

**STRENGTHS**

- flexibly arranged training programmes
- well-managed staff appraisal processes
- good internal communications
- good assessment arrangements
- clear quality assurance policies and procedures

**WEAKNESSES**

- poor initial assessment process
- inadequate management information systems
- failure to monitor employers' promotion of equal opportunities
- insufficient involvement of employers in quality assurance
- insufficient targets in some areas

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- more staff training in basic skills
- better monitoring and analysis of equal opportunities data
- internal verification procedures

40. The company has enabled an extensive range of employers to participate in training by providing flexibly arranged training which is cost effective. Some employers are fully involved in the planning of training and the reviewing of learners' progress and have supervisors who are qualified assessors. Other employers do not have such involvement, however, and in some instances, have little knowledge of the NVQ requirements.

41. The staff are well managed. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The appraisal scheme is well established. Appraisals are clearly recorded. Asset places a

high priority on the personal and professional development of its staff. Many employees are working towards further qualifications. Many staff, however, are not well informed about basic skills training and assessment. There is a well-planned induction programme for new assessors. There is good informal communication between staff. A staff newsletter and successful 'awaydays', keep staff well informed about developments in the organisation. Staff value opportunities to contribute to the development of Asset. The company is well staffed with assessors. Assessors provide learners in the workplace with good support and most visit them fortnightly. Assessors are well informed about the requirements of awarding bodies. Most learners make good progress towards achieving their qualifications.

42. As the self-assessment report acknowledges, management information systems are inadequate. Despite recent improvements they do not encourage effective analysis of the progress of learners. A new computerised system is not functioning effectively and paper-based records, though carefully completed, do not provide a clear overview of learners' performance.

**Equality of opportunity**

**Contributory grade 3**

43. Through its internal and external communications, the company emphasises the importance of equal opportunities. An equal opportunities co-ordinator has been appointed and the equal opportunities policy has recently been revised and updated. The new policy is comprehensive but refers mainly to the employees of Asset rather than the learners. All staff have received guidance on the new policy. There are regular staff development activities on the promotion of equal opportunities and staff understand issues related to equality of opportunity. Learners' induction cover equal opportunities but checks on learners' understanding of equal opportunities are not made afterwards. The company has acknowledged that some learners have a poor understanding of equal opportunities and reference to equal opportunities will now be made during learners' progress reviews. Learners understand the company's grievance and complaints procedures.

44. Company staff make every effort to meet the needs of individual learners. For example, they are prepared to put in extra time to ensure the training needs of night-shift workers are met. Some staff are trained in British Sign language. On their first contact with employers, company staff ask them about their promotion of equal opportunities. They emphasise the need for employers to have an effective policy on equal opportunities. The company has no procedure, however, for monitoring employers' promotion of equal opportunities. It has not taken any specific action to encourage recruitment of learners from under-represented groups on training programmes or options. Information on the gender, ethnicity or disabilities of learners is collected but is not effectively analysed or used in action-planning.

**Quality assurance****Contributory grade 3**

45. Asset has clear policies and procedures for quality assurance. Some procedures have been continuously updated but others have been more recently introduced. The quality assurance system is not yet fully established. A recently formed 'continuous improvement team' brings together managers with quality assurance responsibilities with the aim of promoting a consistent approach to quality assurance throughout the company. All staff were involved in the production of the third self-assessment report. It is a substantial document but is frequently descriptive rather than judgmental and lacks detailed sources of evidence to support its judgements. The subsequent action plan is thorough, realistic and has been regularly updated. There are effective arrangements for gathering feedback from learners about their training. Learners' feedback is usually very positive. Prompt action is taken to deal with problems learners raise. There are inadequate arrangements for collecting the views of employers and for reporting the progress of learners to them.

46. Target-setting is often ineffective. There are no clear and measurable targets in a number of areas. Some of the company's strategic business objectives are too generalised and insufficiently specific, as are the targets staff are set during their appraisals and learners are set during their progress reviews. Internal verification is well-organised. The company has recently strengthened its internal verification process through the appointment of an internal verification co-ordinator and there are seven qualified internal verifiers covering all occupational areas. A high proportion of learners' portfolios are verified. In some instances, however, the verification process is not rigorous enough and does not cover all aspects of assessment.

47. Staff aim to achieve the continuous improvement of training. Reports from external verifiers are consistently positive and confirm that the company has made improvements. The internal audit system failed to identify promptly problems with the training the company provides in London. These were having an adverse effect on learners' progress. Most of these problems have now been resolved but some learners in London have made slow progress towards achieving their NVQs.

### Good Practice

*Asset has introduced reviews of internal verification. Each month some learners are interviewed by the internal verification co-ordinator to discuss their progress. This gives valuable management information on the effectiveness of the assessment process.*

*A small manufacturing company sought help from Asset in meeting its training needs. Asset has devised a cost-effective training scheme. Those who follow it have clear progression routes and benefit from assessment in the workplace. Most supervisors are working to become qualified assessors. The first stage of the process has been successfully completed. The manufacturer is very pleased with the results.*

*The company has appointed an officer to its management team who is responsible for dealing with harassment. This person is able to take up grievance and discrimination cases on behalf of learners. Learners have confidence in their ability of this officer to deal with problems related to harassment.*