

# INSPECTION REPORT

## ASA Training Limited

31 July 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

ASA Training Limited is a private training provider, with offices in Northampton. It trains 18 foundation modern apprentices in the occupational area of retailing, customer service and transportation, and five learners in business administration. This report does not cover business administration separately because of the low number of learners.

### Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Both work-based training for young people and leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

### Work-based learning for young people

Learners benefit from effective support from their employers and few have left their training programmes early. However, assessment is insufficiently thorough. Internal verification is inadequate and has failed to rectify the weaknesses in assessment. The lack of an internal verifier for key skills has meant that no learner has yet achieved the foundation modern apprenticeship.

### Leadership and management

ASA Training Limited does not implement its plans effectively. It does not promote and monitor equal opportunities adequately. Quality assurance is very weak. The organisation lacks arrangements to evaluate its training and obtain anonymous feedback from learners and employers.

## GRADES

<b>Retailing, customer service &amp; transportation</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>4</b>
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	4
Quality assurance	5

**KEY STRENGTHS**

- good support from employers

**KEY WEAKNESSES**

- insufficiently thorough assessments
- poor internal verification
- failure to implement plans
- inadequate promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- no system for evaluating training

**OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

- better reinforcement of learners' induction
- precise targets for learners' rates of achievement, retention and progression
- detailed contracts with all employers and self-employed assessors
- more comprehensive and up-to-date equal opportunities policy

## THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. ASA Training Limited (ASA) was established in 2000. It started to provide government-funded training nine months before the inspection. It is a division of Anderson Stockley Associates, which has carried out training, telemarketing and recruitment for commercial customers since 1993. ASA moved to new offices in Northampton in July 2001. It provides training for commercial customers nationwide. However, most of its government-funded learners are from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. As well as training foundation modern apprentices, ASA trains employers' staff to provide training and assessment in the workplace. ASA is owned and managed by three partners. For its government-funded training, it employs one further full-time staff member and uses four self-employed assessors. Most of these staff also work for the commercial side of the business.

2. Most of the work-based training for young people is funded through the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for Hertfordshire. Recently, the company has also gained a smaller contract, with the local LSC for Bedfordshire and Luton. Hertfordshire is one of the most prosperous counties in the United Kingdom. In April 2001, the rate of unemployment in Hertfordshire was 1.3 per cent, compared with an average for England of 3.3 per cent. Within Hertfordshire, the rate of unemployment ranged from 0.7 per cent in St Albans to 2.1 per cent in Broxbourne. The proportion of Hertfordshire's population from minority ethnic groups is nearly 4 per cent. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Hertfordshire who achieved five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 55.4 per cent, compared with a national average of 49.2 per cent.

## THE INSPECTION

3. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 16 days at ASA in July and August 2001. They visited all the sites where training takes place, and observed and graded four lessons. They interviewed six employers and 12 learners in the workplace and held 14 meetings with ASA's staff, including its partners, trainers and internal verifiers. They examined management files, quality assurance procedures, contracts with the local LSCs, bids, external auditors' reports, data on learners, training resources, and learners' portfolios of evidence and personal files. Inspectors studied ASA's self-assessment report, which was dated 31 July 2001 and presented to them at the start of the inspection.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>

## OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

### Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 4

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	18	4

4. There are 18 foundation modern apprentices in customer service. All are taking additional units from national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in call handling or administration. All the learners are employed. Seventeen work for the same employer at four separate locations. Most of the training and all of the assessments take place in the workplace. ASA's staff visit learners in the workplace to provide off-the-job training and to carry out assessments. In addition, ASA has organised two courses away from the workplace, in hired premises at Hemel Hempstead. Four self-employed assessors and five work-based trainee assessors carry out the assessments. One of the partners has overall responsibility for training and assessment, including counter-signing trainee assessors' decisions. One of ASA's two self-employed internal verifiers provides training in key skills. Key skills assessments are not internally verified. ASA reviews each learner's progress once every three months.

The following table shows the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of inspection.

Work-based learning for young people										
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01		2001-02	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number that started							22		0
Still in training							18	82	0	0
FMA framework completed							0	0	0	0
Left without completing the framework							4	18	0	0

### STRENGTHS

- good support from employers
- high rate of retention



## WEAKNESSES

- insufficiently thorough assessments
- poor internal verification
- ineffective initial assessments
- no integration of key skills training with work towards NVQs

## OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better reinforcement of learners' induction

5. There are good relationships between employers, trainers and learners. All the learners joined their training programmes at the suggestion of their employers. Seventeen of the 18 learners work for the same employer. ASA visits this employer to train its managers and supervisors as work-based assessors. These staff act as mentors and offer ongoing support to learners. Learners' employers understand NVQs and how to gather evidence towards them. There are many opportunities to gather evidence in the workplace. Employers participate in exercises to match the skills learners acquire at work to the requirements of their NVQs.

6. During the nine months since ASA started to offer government-funded training, only 18 per cent of learners have left their training programmes early. Learners are making steady progress. Over 30 per cent have finished gathering evidence towards their NVQs in customer service. However, assessments are insufficiently thorough. ASA uses five qualified assessors and six work-based trainee assessors. Only one of the qualified assessors works full time, the other four work for one to four days each month. Therefore, trainee assessors carry out most of the assessments. Qualified assessors rarely countersign trainee assessors' judgements. Some trainee assessors base their decisions on little evidence. One trainee assessor has recorded two elements as completed on the basis of questioning only. The records of the completed elements are dated December 2000 and January 2001, respectively, but they have not yet been countersigned. The trainee assessor has remained unaware that the decisions are based on insufficient evidence. Some learners believe that they have achieved a unit and stop gathering evidence towards it, when in fact they need to gather further evidence. Some products in learners' portfolios of evidence are not authenticated or fully explained. Some assessors are not sufficiently familiar with the NVQ standards and fail to identify opportunities to cross-reference evidence. Assessments are not planned in sufficient detail. Although work-based assessors are available to carry out observations, there are no more than two observations for each unit of the NVQ. For one unit, there are no observations.

7. Internal verification is poor and is failing to detect the weaknesses in assessment. Assessors do not receive written feedback after observations of their performance. As there are no meetings of all the assessors and the internal verifiers, new assessors do not benefit from sharing good practice. ASA does not plan internal verification, although it does keep paper-based records of the internal verifiers' decisions. One of the internal verifiers issued written guidance to the assessors early in 2001 and has recently carried out three internal verifications. However, the internal verifiers have not verified any units of completed NVQs. ASA has recruited new, experienced staff to rectify this situation and has started to produce newsletters for assessors.

8. Initial assessments are ineffective. ASA does not assess learners' basic skills when they start their training. Learners' individual learning plans are not personalised and do not take into account their specific individual needs. ASA does not record sufficient information on the plans or update them to reflect learners' progress. Learners' optional units are not used as evidence towards their NVQs because they are not listed on the individual learning plans. If learners change their choice of optional units, ASA does not update the plans to reflect this. The plans do not list the qualifications and experience which learners have when they enter their training programmes. Although some learners already have vocational qualifications, which include key skills awards in communication, information technology and application of number, their individual learning plans list these key skills awards as targets. ASA does not accredit experience which learners have acquired with their employers before they started training. This failure to accredit prior learning and experience delays learners' progress.

9. ASA does not integrate training in key skills with occupational training. Nor does it use learners' assignments in the workplace to develop their key skills. Some learners who have almost completed their level 2 NVQ have not received any training in key skills. ASA has recently issued written material to some learners to help them develop their key skills, and plans to issue this material to all learners. However, the organisation does not currently assess learners' key skills. It has recently appointed an assessor, who plans to introduce training and assessment in key skills shortly. Since there is no internal verification, however, learners cannot achieve their key skills awards or their foundation modern apprenticeships.

10. Learners have an informative induction. However, this is not reinforced throughout their training programmes and many learners have a poor recollection of it. Although the induction covers learners' rights and the NVQ framework, some learners do not understand these topics. ASA is currently revising the induction.

#### Poor Practice

*One learner changed employer, leaving her portfolio with her assessor. The portfolio was lost and the learner must now gather fresh evidence for between two and three units of her NVQ.*

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

## Grade 4

11. ASA is owned and managed by its chief executive and two other partners. The chief executive and one other partner are responsible for sales and training. The third partner is responsible for finance. In addition to the three partners, there is one further full-time member of staff. ASA also uses four self-employed assessors and is training six workplace managers and supervisors as work-based assessors. Most of the learners work for one large company, at various sites across the region. The remainder work for a total of four employers. ASA has an equal opportunities policy which applies to both staff and learners. The organisation has not yet established a quality assurance policy, although it has some standard forms and procedures to assure quality. The three partners wrote the self-assessment report in July 2001. All the staff, except for the partners, are too new to have been involved in self-assessment.

### STRENGTHS

- effective monitoring of early leavers
- high proportion of learners in customer service from minority ethnic groups
- full involvement of staff in assuring quality

### WEAKNESSES

- failure to implement plans
- inadequate promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities
- inadequate understanding of equal opportunities among learners and some employers
- insufficient gathering and analysis of feedback from employers and learners
- no system for evaluating training

### OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- precise targets for learners' rates of achievement, retention and progression
- written agreements with all employers
- more detailed contracts with self-employed assessors
- more comprehensive and up-to-date equal opportunities policy

12. When learners leave their training programmes early, ASA makes thorough efforts to contact them by telephone and letter. One learner, who had started with a new employer, was persuaded to continue with ASA and complete her NVQ.

13. ASA does not implement its plans effectively. Its bid to the local LSC described plans to improve training and assessment. These included a commitment to work towards adequate training in key skills. ASA has recently hired a self-employed assessor with the key skills practitioners' award. However, training in key skills is not yet integrated with

## ASA TRAINING LIMITED

occupational training. The bid also set out ASA's plans to promote equal opportunities and eliminate bias from assessments. In addition, the bid referred to a policy and specialist staff to accredit prior learning, to specialists to support learners with additional learning support needs, and to thorough internal verification. None of these goals have been achieved.

14. The small number of learners and staff results in satisfactory communication between most learners, trainers and workplace supervisors. There are regular meetings of all staff and of the partners. However, the minutes of these meetings sometimes fail to record responsibilities and timescales for carrying out actions. Currently, the only targets which the organisation sets for its staff relate to completing units towards their assessors' awards. ASA plans to introduce staff appraisals in August 2001. The chief executive has set targets for learners with the largest employer but these are not recorded in writing. Although there was a target for these learners to achieve their NVQs in July, three learners believe that they will achieve their NVQs in August or September. ASA rarely plans reviews of learners' progress. Many reviews result in broad statements which lack precise, short-term targets.

15. There is an agreement between ASA and the largest employer, setting out the responsibilities of each. It covers grievances, complaints, discipline, equal opportunities, appeals, the awarding body's requirements, quality assurance, assessors' awards, and confidentiality. This agreement does not yet apply to the other four employers.

16. The self-employed assessors have contracts setting out the payments they will receive for each visit and for each learner who achieves an NVQ. However, the contract does not specify assessors' other entitlements or their terms and conditions and hours of work.

**Equality of opportunity****Contributory grade 4**

17. Of the 18 learners on the training programme in customer service, four are from minority ethnic groups. This proportion is higher than the proportion from minority ethnic groups in the local population. None of the five learners in business administration are from minority ethnic groups. Although ASA records the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of the learners it recruits, it does not analyse these data or set targets for recruiting learners with disabilities and learners from minority ethnic groups.

18. ASA covers equal opportunities in its promotional literature for employers. However, it does not reinforce this message to employers after learners start their training. Some employers do not have an equal opportunities policy. ASA does not ask these employers to adopt its own policy. ASA's equal opportunities policy applies to both staff and learners. The policy is brief and inappropriately worded and does not cover training and assessment. Staff discuss equal opportunities at meetings only occasionally. Although ASA's training for work-based assessors covers equal opportunities, some work-based assessors do not recall this. ASA plans to provide training in equal opportunities for some newly recruited part-time trainee assessors shortly. One of ASA's assessors has recently achieved a training qualification which emphasises equal opportunities. However, ASA has not used this assessor's expertise to enhance trainee assessors' awareness of equal opportunities. Learners' induction packs refer to equal opportunities only briefly. ASA has drafted a new induction pack for learners, which covers its disciplinary procedure and types of behaviour which are unacceptable. The current induction pack includes a copy of ASA's appeals procedure and most learners are familiar with this. Equal opportunities is not sufficiently monitored during learners' progress reviews. Most learners do not recall any mention of equal opportunities by their employers. Learners do not appreciate the relevance of equal opportunities to their training and jobs.

**Quality assurance**

**Contributory grade 5**

19. ASA's partners encourage staff to be fully involved in assuring quality. For example, the assessors, including the self-employed assessors, and the internal verifiers have recently been involved in developing new procedures for internal verification and assessment.

20. ASA does not use questionnaires to collect anonymous feedback from learners and employers. Although it gathers feedback from learners and employers at its three-monthly reviews of learners' progress, it has not acted on some of their comments. Many learners are assessed by their workplace supervisors. These learners cannot raise concerns about their assessors with an independent person in their workplace.

21. ASA does not evaluate training systematically. It does not evaluate learners' inductions or the workshops which take place at employers' premises.

22. The self-assessment report was written jointly by ASA's partners. At the time, the assessors were too new to contribute. The report accurately identifies several weaknesses in the occupational area of retailing, customer service and transportation. However, most of the strengths in the self-assessment report are no more than normal practice and the report does not accurately identify the weaknesses in leadership and management. The action plan sets dates for achieving improvements but does not assign responsibility for carrying them out. The report gives higher grades than those awarded by inspectors for both the occupational area and leadership and management