

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **assa Training & Learning Limited**

**23 July 2004**



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 Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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.

## Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **assa Training & Learning Limited**

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. assa Training & Development was established in April 1997 to meet the labour and skills needs of the automotive sector in the Northeast. Following a management buyout in September 2003, the assa Group was consolidated and renamed assa Training and Learning Limited (assa). assa Training & Development, now renamed assa T&D Ltd is now an autonomous company which sits alongside assa. The board of directors is drawn from industry, business and public sector organisations, and has recently been strengthened through the appointment of two non-executive directors, one of whom is the recently retired chief executive of a large college of further education.

2. assa is mainly funded through Tyne & Wear Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the National Contracting Service division of the national LSC. At the time of the inspection there are 2,063 learners, of whom 52 are working towards advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering. The company provides off-the-job training for them through subcontracted colleges of further education in Durham and Gateshead, and on-the-job training through work placements in a large, local car manufacturer and its supply chain companies. All of the modern apprentices are employed. A further 2,011 learners aged over 25 years are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at levels 2 or 3. Of these, 1,515 are on an NVQ in engineering (performing manufacturing operations), 298 are on an NVQ in business administration (business improvement techniques) and 198 are on an NVQ in retailing (warehouse and distribution). All of these learners are employed within placement companies.

### SCOPE OF PROVISION

#### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

3. assa has 52 engineering learners taking advanced modern apprenticeships in engineering maintenance. Modern apprentices start their programmes with a five-day induction at an outdoor training centre. assa employs 49 learners and they attend work placements at a large, local car manufacturer, which employs them at the end of their training programme. Three of the learners are employed by other local companies. Off-the-job training during their first year is carried out at a local college of further education, where modern apprentices work towards an NVQ at level 2, a first diploma and their examined key skills. In their second year, learners begin their NVQ at level 3 in engineering systems maintenance, and their wider key skills. Learners also attend a local college of further education and take a national diploma in electrical and electronic engineering. assa's assessors assess learners in the workplace and also review and monitor their progress regularly. Learners are able to progress to more advanced qualifications as part of their advanced modern apprenticeship.

4. There are 1,515 learners working towards NVQs at level 2 in performing manufacturing operations. All learners are employed, working for 14 companies

## ASSA TRAINING & LEARNING LIMITED

performing a wide range of manufacturing and processing operations. Most of them are located in the Northeast, but there are also learners in the Midlands, East and South. assa offers the training programme to employers, and all aspects of the programme delivery are carried out at the employers' premises. Most of the learners recruited through this process are experienced operatives who complete the programme in 12 weeks. Learners attend an induction of two to three hours that includes an assessment of their literacy and numeracy needs, and provides an overview of the training programme. Each learner is allocated to an assessor. At sites with a significant number of learners, one or more assessors work full time at that site until learners have completed their qualifications. Assessment is planned and carried out in the workplace. Learners' progress is reviewed at the mid-point of the programme.

### **Business administration, management & professional**

5. assa has 298 learners on the business improvement techniques (BIT) NVQ programme and, of these, 278 are working towards NVQs at level 2 and 20 are working towards NVQs at level 3. assa offers three delivery methods for the programme, which are matched to employers' requirements. The first method, called the five-day model, delivers a five-day training course in BIT followed by an individual project with sustained assessment until the learners' portfolios contain sufficient evidence. The second method, called the traditional model, includes individual assessment, observations and project work. Each learner builds an evidence portfolio. The third method, called the Vauxhall model, delivers a five-day training course followed by three individual candidate projects, and assessment, over a period of 12 months. Learners following the five-day and traditional models work towards NVQs at level 2. Learners following the Vauxhall model work towards NVQs at level 3. A fourth delivery method is used for learners who work towards an NVQ at level 3 immediately after achieving an NVQ at level 2. These learners are known as change agents and they complete all mandatory and selected optional units at level 2 before going on to level 3. All training is carried out in the workplace or in an appropriate learning environment near to the workplace. assa's staff deliver training to all learners on the five-day and Vauxhall models. assa's staff visit the learners in the workplace to give them coaching, guidance and support, and observe them at work and carry out assessments on all of the delivery methods.

### **Retailing, customer service & transportation**

6. assa has 198 learners in this programme area working towards an NVQ at level 2 in warehousing, distribution and storage. All learners are over 25, employed and are working in medium-sized and large companies. Fourteen assessors carry out assessment in the workplace, and there are three internal verifiers dedicated to this area of learning. Assessors are allocated to a company and remain on site until all learners have completed their NVQ. Employers carry out on-the-job training in the workplace.

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	13
Number of inspection days	65
Number of learner interviews	154
Number of staff interviews	52
Number of employer interviews	52
Number of subcontractor interviews	2
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	44

## OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. assa's leadership and management and its arrangements for equality of opportunity are outstanding, and its quality assurance is good. The quality of provision in engineering, technology and manufacturing, and in business administration, management and professional, is good; in retailing, customer service and transportation it is outstanding. The quality of provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it.

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak*

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>1</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		1
Quality assurance		2

<b>Engineering, technology &amp; manufacturing</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Manufacturing</b>		
- Other government-funded provision	1515	2
<b>Other contributory areas</b>		
- Work-based learning for young people	52	1

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Other contributory areas</b>		
- Other government-funded provision	298	2

Retailing, customer service & transportation		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Warehousing and distribution</b> - Other government-funded provision	198	1

## KEY FINDINGS

### Achievement and standards

8. **Retention and achievement rates for modern apprentices in engineering maintenance are good and improving.** In manufacturing, the number of learners successfully completing their course has risen from 78 per cent to 91 per cent over the three years the course has been running. There has been a similar trend in warehousing and distribution, with retention and achievement at 91 per cent. The BIT programme has not been running long enough for learners to achieve their qualifications, but in-programme retention is good and learners acquire a wide range of appropriate skills.

9. **Learners taking modern apprenticeships gain additional qualifications.** All modern apprentices complete a higher national certificate, in addition to the first and national diploma courses which form the technical certificate for their framework. Many modern apprentices complete higher national diplomas, and employers sponsor some of them to take engineering degrees. In addition, learners complete training courses in, for example, pneumatics and hydraulics, wiring and abrasive wheel regulations and robotics.

10. **Learners are motivated and knowledgeable.** For example, on the performing manufacturing operations programme, learners are highly motivated and enthusiastic about the NVQ programme, and they demonstrate a good understanding of manufacturing processes. Many learners on the programme have no previous qualifications and have failed to complete NVQ programmes run by other training providers.

11. **Modern apprentices produce good-quality work.** Learners develop good broad-based engineering skills during initial training. The standard of work produced in both on- and off-the-job training is high. For example, bench-fitting exercises completed during on-the-job training are produced to tolerances 50 per cent tighter than those required in the NVQ standards.

### Quality of education and training

12. **There is excellent learner and employer involvement in training and assessment.** For example, on the BIT programme employers attend the final day of the off-the-job training,



during which they participate in a formal presentation, made by their employees, and make arrangements for work-based projects to be completed. Learners on the BIT programme are highly motivated, and employers have identified significant cost savings which they have implemented on completing the training. In warehousing and distribution, assa has developed good links with a wide range of national and international companies.

**13. assa has good training and training resources.** On- and off-the-job training for modern apprentices is good. Learners find the training delivered by the subcontracted college effective and interesting. Employers endorse this view and find the initial training provides good preparation for the on-the-job training that the modern apprentices complete on returning to their company. On-the-job training ensures that the modern apprentices make good progress in developing the advanced technical skills that the employers require. All training resources are good. There is very good off-the-job training for learners on the BIT programme, and training resources are also good.

**14. assa provides its learners with good support.** For example, engineering modern apprentices have regular progress reviews and assessment visits. They are well supported by their employers and staff at the subcontracted college. assa's staff and representatives of the employers visit the college regularly during initial training. For mature NVQ candidates, assessment is completed by assa's assessors, who work full time in the company until the assessment process is completed. This approach is supportive and minimises disruption to work patterns, with the assessors working the same shift system as the learners. Assessors are sympathetic to the needs of adult learners and learners speak highly of the support they receive.

**15. The company has effective strategies for delivering NVQ programmes to mature candidates.** It has developed an effective strategy for delivering NVQ programmes, which minimises disruption to the manufacturing process, negates the requirement for learners to build an individual portfolio, by using a master portfolio, uses their prior experience and motivates them to complete the qualification.

**16. Some assessment practice and progress reviews are weak.** For example, on the BIT programme assessment plans do not include dates for future assessment visits and the observation assessment does not monitor learners' progress against the NVQ standards. Arrangements for reviews on the BIT programme are unsatisfactory. There are a significant number of missed or delayed reviews, and where they have taken place the review document is insufficiently detailed and contains few challenging targets.

**17.** The delivery of the manufacturing NVQ programme is inconsistent. Although assa has developed an effective strategy for delivering the performing manufacturing operations NVQ programme, inspectors found some inconsistent delivery of the programme. For example, some learners have insufficient understanding of the assessment and portfolio-building process. However, most of them fully understand the process.

**18.** assa does not share the contents of electronic individual learning plans with the

learners. The learners' individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed and are not updated. However, the electronic data that assa holds centrally is comprehensive and updated regularly.

## Leadership and management

19. **assa has a clear strategic direction, excellent business-planning processes, and effective collaborative links with employers and other partners.** The whole company focuses on delivering a high standard of training and learning. The board is effective and critically monitors activity at strategic and operational levels. The company has important and meaningful strategic partnerships with a range of regional and national organisations. Staff and managers have regular interaction and dialogue with employers.

20. **The company's use of management information systems to promote continuous improvement is outstanding.** assa uses it to generate meaningful information which it uses to critically review all aspects of the training provision. It collects a wide range of information and disseminates it to managers and teams for the purpose of monitoring, trend analysis, development planning and target-setting. The system is currently being developed as a web-based learners' management tool and virtual learning environment.

21. **There is good staff development, particularly for new staff, who complete an effective and informative induction process.** All staff are appraised annually, and have six-monthly reviews. The appraisal process is clearly linked to staff development, and the staff development programme meets corporate as well as individual needs.

22. **The company promotes and monitors equality and diversity very well.** The promotion of equality and diversity to staff, learners and employers is good. Learners cover equality and diversity during their induction, at progress reviews, and through other training activities, and have a good understanding of the issues. Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues is good. Mandatory and ongoing training takes place for all staff and assa's equal opportunities handbook is available in hard copy and on assa's intranet. There is very good monitoring of learners' statistics to ensure inclusivity.

23. **The quality assurance of subcontractor and staff performance is effective.** assa has an effective system to monitor the quality of training provided by its subcontracting further education college. The system collects both qualitative and quantitative data on the delivery of training to assa's learners. The subcontractor is set a wide range of minimum performance targets. Where these are not met, remedial action is agreed and all parties monitor improvements closely. The system has proved to be effective in improving the quality of training over time. assa has an effective system to monitor the performance of its training staff in the key aspects of their job function, and their compliance with the company's quality assurance system.

24. Some quality assurance practices are not yet fully implemented. assa has a strong commitment to continuous improvement. The quality assurance system has recently been reviewed and a number of new policies introduced. At the time of inspection these policies had not been given sufficient time for some procedures to be fully effective.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Strengths**

- excellent strategic direction and business-planning process
- highly effective and collaborative partnerships with employers and external organisations
- outstanding use of the management information system to support continuous improvement
- good staff development
- very good promotion of equality and diversity to learners, staff and employers
- very good monitoring of equality and diversity to ensure inclusivity
- effective monitoring of the college subcontractor
- good quality assurance of staff performance

### **Weaknesses**

- incomplete implementation of quality assurance practices

## **Engineering, technology & manufacturing**

### ***Manufacturing***

#### *Strengths*

- good and improving retention and achievement rates
- well-motivated and knowledgeable learners
- good support for learners
- effective strategy for delivering the training programme

#### *Weaknesses*

- inconsistent delivery of the training programme

***Other contributory areas***

*Strengths*

- good and improving retention and achievement rates
- good completion of a range of additional qualifications
- good on- and off-the-job training
- good-quality work from the learners
- good training resources in the workplace
- particularly good support for learners

*Weaknesses*

- inconsistent internal verification practice

**Business administration, management & professional**

***Other contributory areas***

*Strengths*

- good retention rate
- excellent employer and learner involvement
- very good off-the-job training
- good learning resources

*Weaknesses*

- weak assessment practice
- insufficient learners' awareness of the content of their electronic individual learning plans
- unsatisfactory arrangements for learners' progress reviews

**Retailing, customer service & transportation**

***Warehousing and distribution***

*Strengths*

- excellent retention and achievement rates
- good links with supportive employers
- good support for learners

*Weaknesses*

- no significant weaknesses

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ASSA TRAINING & LEARNING LIMITED:**

- it provides a worthwhile course that motivates them
- good training at the college
- good support from assessors, who are very good at making them feel at ease
- friendly, knowledgeable and responsive staff
- everything is explained very clearly
- its flexible and accommodating approach
- the informative and well-organised induction
- the opportunity to make new friends
- very little paperwork to complete

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK ASSA TRAINING & LEARNING LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:**

- better access for learners to their portfolios of evidence
- more in-depth feedback on the literacy and numeracy tests
- more time allocated for on-the-job assessment
- smaller groups on the induction
- less time between induction and first assessment
- better access to the background knowledge questions before being tested

**KEY CHALLENGES FOR ASSA TRAINING & LEARNING LIMITED:**

- maintain current trend in retention and achievement rates
- fully implement recently introduced quality assurance procedures
- ensure greater consistency in delivery of the training programme
- ensure greater consistency in assessment and internal verification
- share centrally held individual learning plan data with the learners
- ensure that arrangements for learners' progress reviews are more consistent

## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 1

#### Strengths

- excellent strategic direction and business-planning process
- highly effective and collaborative partnerships with employers and external organisations
- outstanding use of the management information system to support continuous improvement
- good staff development
- very good promotion of equality and diversity to learners, staff and employers
- very good monitoring of equality and diversity to ensure inclusivity
- effective monitoring of the college subcontractor
- good quality assurance of staff performance

#### Weaknesses

- incomplete implementation of quality assurance practices

25. The company's strategic direction and business-planning process are excellent. They provide a very clear platform for assa to focus on and deliver a high standard of training and learning. There is a concern to deliver value and have a high level of impact on learners and employers. The company has focused board meetings and effective input from non-executive and executive members, who closely and critically monitor activity at a strategic and operational level. A wide range of networking activity ensures that the company is knowledgeable about the needs of the sector and how best it can respond to meet those needs. The structure of the company is clear and effective, and staff demonstrate a clear understanding of its aims, objectives and values. Staff are knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities and how they relate to others in the company. A strong emphasis on teamwork impacts positively on the learners. assa deploys its staff effectively and manages its staffing resources well.

26. assa has highly effective and collaborative partnerships with employers and external organisations. Staff engage effectively and are responsive in order to meet the needs of employers and their learners. There is regular interaction and dialogue with employers where assa staff listen, adapt, develop and are prepared to tackle challenges innovatively. The company has important and meaningful strategic partnerships with local industry, the Regional Development Agency, local further education colleges, and local and national LSCs. assa's staff were key partners working collaboratively with one of the subcontracted colleges of further education to support them in gaining approval for Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status. assa, the college and a large local motor manufacturing company are equal partners in achieving CoVE status.

## ASSA TRAINING & LEARNING LIMITED

27. The company makes outstanding use of the management information system to support continuous improvement. It is continually evolving as a web-based management tool and virtual learning environment, and it can generate meaningful information easily that the company can use to critically review all aspects of performance. The company collects a wide range of information and disseminates it to relevant managers and teams for the purpose of monitoring, trend analysis, development planning and target-setting. assa displays graphical evidence of key performance indicators that are updated monthly, such as performance against enrolment, retention and achievement, performance relating to each programme area and a skills matrix monitoring the activity of delivery staff.

28. The company's development of its staff is good. For new staff this begins with an effective and informative induction process. The content is relevant and focused and encapsulated within a comprehensive company handbook. This support continues through appraisal, training and development. All staff are receive an annual appraisal and six-monthly reviews. Appraisal is linked very clearly to staff development. There are thorough arrangements for staff training and development, which are linked to the needs of the company and individual members of staff. assa encourages staff to participate in continuing professional development and many of them do so. There is a staff development plan and a central record of staff training. The human resource function is relatively new and has yet to further establish and evaluate some of the updated policies and procedures introduced to comply with legislation and reflect best practice. However, early indications suggest that the significant changes are having a positive impact. For example, the new recruitment and selection procedure and job descriptions have enabled assa to recruit good-quality staff to provide a better service to learners and employers.

29. assa has recently introduced a number of initiatives to deal with communication issues, some of which were highlighted in an employee survey carried out in October 2003. assa has a clear and comprehensive company handbook and makes use of a staff and employer newsletter, notice boards and a staff suggestion scheme to communicate more widely. Staff, managers and directors work well together and participate in away days and communication days to share information. Directors and managers are approachable, provide strong support to staff and are responsive to their needs. Learners and employers benefit from the staff's open and flexible approach to teamwork and their high levels of commitment. There are regular team and management meetings, for example, weekly business development reviews and monthly assessors' meetings. All meetings have agendas and standing items, and many of them have a strong focus on the learner. The company records each meeting effectively and monitors planned actions well.

30. assa pays careful attention to the learners' health and safety, and monitors this effectively throughout its training programmes. The company is very safety conscious and supports this with comprehensive relevant policies. Activities such as induction, progress reviews, monitoring and risk assessment all emphasise the importance of health and safety. Manuals are up to date, internal audits are carried out and accidents are reported and analysed. Learners have a clear understanding of health and safety issues.



31. There is a skills for life strategy and action plan and a senior manager is responsible to lead this. assa has introduced some incentives to encourage employers to release staff and employees to do additional courses where additional literacy and numeracy needs have been identified. Learners with additional needs are well supported.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 1**

32. The promotion of equality and diversity issues to learners, staff and employers is very good. There are comprehensive and up-to-date policies and procedures. Learners have a good understanding of issues relating to equality of opportunity. Through induction, reviews, the use of videos and reinforcement during training and assessment activities, learners are able to discuss their rights and responsibilities, and how to deal with issues as they relate to the working environment, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. The company's equal opportunities handbook is available in hard copy and on the company's intranet. assa's website promotes equality and diversity, and its promotional materials, such as pens, mouse mats and torches, display a free telephone number for learners to call in cases of harassment, bullying or other kinds of unfair treatment. Staff awareness and understanding of equality and diversity issues are good. Induction for new staff includes a discussion about the policies and practices, and the completion of two learndirect modules. The company provides mandatory and ongoing training and plans this for all of its existing staff. assa works closely with employers to promote equality and diversity, and uses service-level agreements as part of the monitoring process with employers. For employers without their own policies, assa offers to work with them in their development. The company makes some positive attempts to influence employers by demonstrating its own good practice. For example, assa provides some disability and discrimination training, and some of the meetings between the company's staff and employers deal with equality and diversity issues as a standard agenda item.

33. assa has been recognised and awarded for its commitment to equality and diversity. For example, the company has recently introduced a number of initiatives, such as the appointment of an equal opportunities manager, the production of an equal opportunities audit report, the establishment of an action plan, a monitoring group and a number of specific equal opportunities standards to monitor issues and progress. The company uses these standards as an ongoing audit tool and they are an effective means of identifying and disseminating good practice.

34. There is very good monitoring of equality and diversity to ensure inclusivity. The company uses the management information system effectively for the thematic analysis of data. For example, information regarding recruitment, selection, achievement, retention and progression is evaluated in relation to the age, gender, disability and ethnicity of different learner groups. assa uses the data to help decision-making, action-planning and target-setting. The company has a range of positive and proactive strategies and practices to deal with the widening participation agenda. For example, assa provides some courses to a wide range of age groups, and reduces or removes barriers to learning for those individuals with physical and/or learning disabilities, through the use of signers, good access to buildings and resources, and personal and vocational support. assa is

developing a broader base of materials to meet the needs of those learners with literacy, numeracy or language needs. The company's policies are user-friendly and are available in different formats. The promotion of equal opportunities takes place through the use of appropriate recruitment literature and advertising, which is designed to break down stereotypical views and attract applicants from under-represented groups. There is a current focus on attracting women into engineering, and two members of staff are involved in the local business ambassador programme, which aims to link schools and young people with local industry. assa's staff are working with schools, participate in parents' evenings and attend recruitment fairs in order to attract more women and people from minority ethnic groups to its training programmes.

35. All staff have a commitment to equal opportunities practice, continual monitoring, review and evaluation, and recognise that continuous improvement with regard to best practice is ongoing. Arrangements to monitor the employers and their equal opportunities policies and practices are comprehensive. Many of the practices that assa has adopted are new and need to be further established before their full impact on the equality and diversity agenda can be evaluated.

### **Quality assurance**

### **Contributory grade 2**

36. assa has a thorough and effective system to monitor the quality of training that a further education college subcontractor provides. A well-designed quarterly monitoring system collects both qualitative and quantitative data on the delivery of training to assa's learners. The system identifies minimum performance targets that the company expects the subcontractor to meet. Where the subcontractor fails to meet the agreed thresholds it agrees remedial action with assa. The system is effective in improving the quality of training and has, for example, resulted in changes to the structure of the training to overcome difficulties experienced by learners, such as increasing the duration of a module by several weeks to improve learners' achievement rates. The system evaluates the views of learners and action is taken to meet improvements that they suggest. In addition to the subcontractor's internal arrangements for monitoring the quality of training, a member of assa visits the college to evaluate the quality of the subcontractor's training. assa and the subcontractors agree an action plan to improve the quality of training where the evaluation indicates that the training was less than satisfactory.

37. assa has an effective and thorough quality assurance system to monitor the performance of staff in the key aspects of their job functions and their compliance with the company's quality assurance procedures. The company uses a staff skills matrix to record their level of competence and skills and to identify their suitability to carry out activities with learners. assa uses the staff skills matrix effectively to identify individual development needs and to assist managers to identify skill shortages within their departments. Staff assessing learners are monitored by internal verifiers and company staff in relation to their assessment practice, occupational competence and administrative functions. The company monitors staff carrying out training and reviews systematically, to ensure that they comply with assa's procedures and good practice. Where a member of staff's performance is unsatisfactory the company makes arrangements to improve their performance and carries out further monitoring.

38. The self-assessment process and resulting report are satisfactory. Individual staff members and the company as a whole have a high level of commitment to continuous improvement. All staff were involved in the self-assessment through two questionnaires that collected data on current strengths and weakness and the changes that had occurred from the previous self-assessment. In addition, assa made good use of information from questionnaires completed by learners and the information derived from an independent survey of employers' views. The self-assessment report is available to staff at all times through the company's intranet, which enables them to comment on changes within the company that should be reflected in the self-assessment report. Some of the judgements in the self-assessment report are descriptive rather than evaluative. The self-assessment report matches some of the strengths that the inspectors found but does not recognise some of the weaknesses that the inspectors identified.

39. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company manages and implements the policy and procedures for internal verification appropriately. Internal verifiers and assessors meet each month.

40. assa has not yet fully implemented some quality assurance procedures. The company has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and has introduced three new quality assurance policies over a period of 10 months and revised most of the other quality assurance policies within the past three months. There has been insufficient time for some procedures to become fully effective and staff are not familiar with all of the policies. Some procedures are not fully effective in ensuring quality across all occupational areas.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Engineering, technology & manufacturing		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Manufacturing</b> - Other government-funded provision	1515	2
<b>Other contributory areas</b> - Work-based learning for young people	52	1

#### **Manufacturing**

##### *Strengths*

- good and improving retention and achievement rates
- well-motivated and knowledgeable learners
- good support for learners
- effective strategy for delivering the training programme

##### *Weaknesses*

- inconsistent delivery of the training programme

#### **Other contributory areas**

##### *Strengths*

- good and improving retention and achievement rates
- good completion of a range of additional qualifications
- good on- and off-the-job training
- good-quality work from the learners
- good training resources in the workplace
- particularly good support for learners

##### *Weaknesses*

- inconsistent internal verification practice

### **Achievement and standards**

41. Retention and achievement rates for modern apprenticeships are good and are improving. Modern apprentices complete their framework within the allocated time. All learners who complete the training programme achieve the advanced modern apprenticeship. The standard of work produced during off-the-job training is high, as is

the quality of work in the workplace. All learners have employed status during their modern apprenticeship, and all gain permanent employment on completing their training. Learners develop good, broad-based engineering skills during their initial training and employers identify this as effective preparation for on-the-job training. Learners produce good-quality logbooks and portfolios of evidence, which are clear, well constructed and contain a good range of valid evidence. Learners are proud of their achievements and enjoy discussing their achievements and the progress that they have made. All of them complete a range of additional qualifications and training programmes. All learners achieve a higher national certificate in engineering and some progress to higher national diplomas and degree programmes which their employers sponsor. Learners have the opportunity to achieve formal training qualifications within their company. These cover such areas as hydraulic and pneumatic systems, electrical installation and wiring regulations, abrasive wheels regulations and robotic systems. All of the modern apprentices complete their key skills before the end of their second year of training.

42. Manufacturing learners are motivated, competent and knowledgeable. They have a good knowledge of manufacturing and processing practices. Almost without exception, learners are motivated and enthusiastic about the training programme. They speak highly of assa's staff and the seamless, unobtrusive and flexible assessment practice that confirms the standard to which they have been trained and are working to in their companies. Many learners start training with no previous formal qualifications, and learners who had prematurely left the inflexible manufacturing NVQ programme of another provider found that assa's provision met their needs.

43. Of those learners who started the NVQ programme in 2001-02, 78 per cent were retained and achieved their qualification. The following year, retention and achievement increased to 91 per cent, and in the current year, 55 per cent have achieved so far.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	Number of starts	13		30		16		1		21		48				
Retained*	0		0		0		0	0	18	86	37	77				
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0	0	16	76	34	71				
Still in learning	12		28		11		1	100	0	0	0	0				

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Other government funded																	
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	3934		3119		223												
Retained*	2181		2843	91	175	78											
Successfully completed	2181		2843	91	175	78											
Still in training	1507		8	0	0	0											

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

### Quality of education and training

44. On- and off-the-job training for modern apprenticeships are good. All of the learners that the inspectors interviewed stated that teaching and training at the local college are effective and interesting. Teachers are able to use their considerable knowledge of industrial practices to enable better understanding. The company’s training managers also regard the standard of this teaching and training as good. They visit the college regularly to review the training programme and its delivery. assa’s staff also attend these meetings. The teaching and training of the NVQ at level 2 provides learners with good foundation skills to begin their work-based learning programmes. The training is delivered in well-equipped, purpose-built classrooms and workshops. assa worked effectively as a key partner to support the local college of further education in gaining CoVE status for its provision in engineering. assa, the college and a large local motor manufacturing company are equal partners in achieving CoVE status. On-the-job training further refines the practical skills that the learners learn at college. For example, several bench-fitting exercises are completed where learners produce test pieces to tolerances that are 50 per cent tighter than those required by the NVQ. Learners are placed with technically experienced staff who ensure that their practical skills and understanding are developed safely and progressively. Programmes are planned for the duration of the modern apprenticeship programme, and departmental supervisors monitor progress against planned objectives regularly. The training and learning experience has been broken down into 82 activities in which the modern apprentices participate during their training period. The workplace supervisors record all of the learners’ activities in their logbooks and mark them. These activities ensure that the learners fully understand the practical tasks that they have carried out.

45. Workplace training resources for modern apprentices are good. For example, in press shops, learners are able to develop their skills on de-commissioned press dies. In the factory areas, where learners are training to be multi-skilled maintenance staff, they have access to training on de-commissioned machinery. There is also access to wiring, pneumatic and hydraulic training rigs. Towards the end of their training programme, learners work on production equipment which includes industrial robotic equipment.

46. There is good support for modern apprentices. An assessor from assa carries out regular visits to learners at college and in the workplace. These visits are to carry out progress reviews and assessment reviews. Learners and employers value the frequency of visits. The internal verifier periodically visits the workplace to interview learners and verify evidence. Employers have mentor schemes in several departments and experienced and skilled maintenance staff from different shifts support and guide the learners. Learners are formally reviewed each year as part of the staff appraisal process and more frequently by their workplace supervisors. Workplace supervisors make all evidence logbook entries and provide the learners with feedback. Employers demand high standards and learners state that this encourages them to produce good-quality work. assa's staff and those at the employers frequently visit the local college that learners attend to review their training programme with learners, teaching staff and managers. This constant contact and review ensures that the college programmes are run effectively and that the learners' experience is good.

47. All modern apprentices attend a residential outdoor team-building training week at an adventure training centre in their first year. This successful and well-received course is used effectively to develop teamworking and individual personal skills. It is also used very effectively as a source of evidence to support key skills training. All learners receive an initial assessment for literacy, numeracy and mechanical aptitude.

48. Progress reviews for modern apprentices are satisfactory. assa holds these every 12 weeks and supports them with frequent assessment reviews. The company sets targets and reviews them at each meeting. assa has recently amended the paperwork for recording the review. The document is brief and limits the amount of useful information that can be recorded. On completion of the learners' progress review the result and agreed targets are shared with the learners' workplace supervisor, who does not attend the review meeting.

49. Assessment and internal verification at the subcontracted college are satisfactory. The content of the technical certificate meets the requirement of the modern apprenticeship framework. Assignments, training exercises and practical projects are well designed. An accredited and occupationally qualified assessor carries out assessment on the job, which is regular, fair and satisfactory. Internal verification of NVQs has some inconsistencies. While the internal verifier takes a sample of the learners' evidence and interviews them, it is not clear how thorough the verification of the assessment decision actually is. For example, where recorded evidence identifies that a learner has needed support or guidance during an activity, it is not possible to determine that the internal verifier has determined how this has impacted on the assessment decision.

50. assa has developed an effective strategy for delivering the manufacturing programme that minimises disruption to the employers' manufacturing and processing activities. It also negates the requirement for learners to build a portfolio, minimises the duration of the programme for learners with prior manufacturing experience, and motivates them to complete their modern apprenticeship framework. assa's staff visit employers recruited to the programme and evaluate the specific processes carried out by the employers in relation to the NVQ standards. The employer is supported in the production of a 'master



portfolio', which is tailored to meet their manufacturing processes and contains all the relevant documents, including health and safety legislation and practice. All of the learners at a company have access to the master portfolio and assa confirms that it meets the supplementary evidence requirements of the NVQ. The company has developed a wide range of questions to test the learners' knowledge and understanding across the whole of the standards, and assessors use these effectively to confirm the learners' knowledge. The programme is well structured and organised, and supported by detailed and clearly specified implementation procedures covering all aspects of the programme. The strategy is valued by employers as a cost-effective way of crediting learners with their competence, and motivating them towards further development and improvement.

51. There is good support for manufacturing learners. In most cases, one or more assessors are resident full time at the employers' premises for most of the duration of the programme, and they are reliably available to the learners across shift patterns. They are approachable and fit in with the employers' production demands. Learners and assessors have good working relationships. Learners speak highly of assessors and their flexible approach to assessment and understand the production targets that need to be met. Employers' managers and workplace supervisors allow learners sufficient time to complete the required aspects of the NVQ, including the assessment and review process. A formal progress review is carried out at the mid-point of the programme. The process is thorough and reinforces health and safety, equal opportunities and diversity using relevant questioning. Learners' responses are appropriate, and they demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of equality and diversity. Some employers provide insufficient constructive input to the learners' progress reviews. Some of the targets and comments recorded do not add value to the process, and the records in general are insufficiently detailed to capture the quality of practice seen by the inspectors.

52. Assessment of manufacturing is satisfactory. Assessors are appropriately qualified, with good industry knowledge and experience, and they make effective use of observations of the learners' performance in the workplace on three separate occasions. However, records of evidence collected through this last process are not referenced to the standards, and there is no clear indication of how the standards are met. assa recognises this is a weakness in the system and is putting in an improvement to overcome this.

53. Induction on manufacturing is satisfactory. Learners are inducted to the training programme in a two- to three-hour session, which includes initial assessment, a literacy and numeracy test, and an overview of the programme. At the progress review the test results are fed back to the learners. Irrespective of the results, learners are offered further support for literacy, numeracy and language through learndirect's skills for life courses. There are some learners on the training programme for whom English is not their first language. assa supports these learners effectively and those with physical disabilities such as deafness.

54. The delivery of the manufacturing training is inconsistent. Learners at some employers' sites do not understand the assessment process sufficiently, or how they are to achieve the qualification. Some learners are unaware of the purpose of the



observations and questioning, and their significance to competent performance in the workplace. Some of them do not see their portfolio, and do not have sufficient awareness of its contents. Some learners, having achieved the qualification, are unsure of what they have done to achieve it. On some occasions, the assessors' observations are carried out over consecutive days, and some learners find it difficult to respond effectively to the assessors' extensive questioning over such a short period. Most of the learners on the training programme have a good understanding of the entire process.

### **Leadership and management**

55. Planning of the modern apprenticeship programme is good. Targets for framework completion are set and reviewed at management meetings. A qualified assessor is responsible for the progression of learners through their modern apprenticeship framework and for providing the necessary levels of advice guidance and support. assa has good internal and external communications. The company holds regular staff meetings and monthly assessors' meetings. Employers' representatives and assa's staff visit the learners regularly during off-the-job training. Field staff visit the learners every four to six weeks in the workplace and involve the employers in the review process. assa keeps employers informed of the learners' progress and attendance at college. The company holds regular steering group meetings where it advises employers of developments and changes at assa. Employers speak highly of the company, its staff and the support that it provides for the learners. Equality of opportunity induction training is memorable and is reinforced at the learners' progress reviews by reference to a series of equal opportunities issues. Learners demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of these issues. Staff development is satisfactory. The company carries out performance appraisals every six months and gives staff the opportunity for development through training. Quality assurance arrangements are good and most procedures are stable. Some procedures, such as the review procedure, are relatively new and require further time to become fully established.

56. Staff development on the manufacturing programme is good. New staff receive a comprehensive induction and they are well supported during their development. Assessors have a wide experience of manufacturing and are committed to supporting the learners. Internal verification is satisfactory. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Managers are successful in improving rates of retention and achievement. Assessors, verifiers and project managers have regular and productive meetings. Targets are set for learners' outcomes, assessors' observations and retention rates. There is good monitoring of the quality of practice of staff delivering all aspects of the training programme. Communications days, held twice a year, involve all staff and keep them involved in strategic developments and continuous improvements. There is very good communications between assa and the employers. There are weekly progress meetings between assa's project manager and the employers. Through diverse funding arrangements, assa is able to offer the programme to all production employees in a company, irrespective of their age. Self-assessment identified some, but not all, of the strengths that the inspectors found, but did not identify the weakness. The self-assessment grade was accurate.

**Business administration, management & professional**

<b>Business administration, management &amp; professional</b>		<b>2</b>
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Other contributory areas</b> - Other government-funded provision	298	2

**Other contributory areas**

*Strengths*

- good retention rate
- excellent employer and learner involvement
- very good off-the-job training
- good learning resources

*Weaknesses*

- weak assessment practice
- insufficient learners’ awareness of the content of their electronic individual learning plans
- unsatisfactory arrangements for learners’ progress reviews

**Achievement and standards**

57. The learners’ retention rate is good. Retention for learners on the first pilot programme was 77 per cent. Retention on the current programme for all learners is over 90 per cent. It is too early in the programme to judge achievement, but learners are now making progress and are acquiring a wide range of skills and management techniques, which they are able to use in their work roles.

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

<b>Other government funded</b>															
	<b>2003-04</b>		<b>2002-03</b>												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	298		88												
Retained*	0		68	77											
Successfully completed	0		68	77											
Still in training	298		0	0											

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

## Quality of education and training

58. There is excellent employer and learner involvement on the BIT programme. Employers attend the final day of the five-day off-the-job programme, which gives them the opportunity to listen to the views of learners during a formal presentation and to make arrangements for learners to carry out their workplace projects. In some cases, employers authorise overtime for course cover, or arrange for shift changes to enable learners to participate in projects. One employer has set up a project centre for BIT in the workplace, enabling learners to work on their projects during shifts and to display charts and graphs concerning the programme. Learners are highly motivated and are actively involved in the programme. Many learners have contributed to significant cost savings for their employers as a result of the programme, and in one case savings of over £120,000 have been realised. There are numerous other examples in a range of workplaces. Learners feel that this programme has contributed to their personal development and given them the confidence to carry out presentations and to communicate better with management.

59. The off-the-job training on the BIT programme is very good. Training activities are well planned and well structured and use a range of teaching methods to maintain the learners' interest and involvement. The programme contains a number of practical activities, which allow the learners to practise and develop business improvement techniques. As an example, learners build a miniature motorcycle and are able to modify their production strategies to effect maximum efficiency and profitability. Each group of learners is then placed on a league table, which encourages competition. There is good teaching and learning with well-developed tutors' notes, good-quality presentation material and detailed learners' handouts.

60. Resources for learning are good. Course tutors have recent occupational experience and are all employed by assa. Some are taking teaching and further academic qualifications. Tutors delivering associated training work for professional business improvement organisations. All assessors are appropriately qualified or taking their assessor qualifications. Qualified staff mentor those taking assessor qualifications. A number of companies have a learndirect centre on-site, which they encourage the learners to use. Additional material available includes CD-ROMs, internet facilities, books, periodicals and pamphlets. Employers' training facilities are of a good quality and include training and conference rooms, work rooms for learners and resource centres. Where they do not have on-site facilities, they use good-quality hotel facilities.

61. Assessment practices for learners on the BIT programme are weak. Learners are assessed at their workplace during the formal off-the-job training. There is an additional assessor's visit to observe the learners, again at their workplace, to confirm competence. Assessment plans do not include targets dates for projects or future assessment visits. The observation assessment does not monitor individual progress against the NVQ standards. Although assessment paperwork contains significant detail, it does not cross-reference the learners' progress to the achievement of the NVQ units. All learners attending off-the-job training are accredited with the same NVQ competences

irrespective of their previous experience or job responsibilities. For a significant number of learners, there have been delays of up to four months between the completion of their formal training and associated projects and their next, and in many cases final, observation visit. Learners are not set challenging targets during this period and do not know when the next assessment visit will take place. The internal verification arrangements are satisfactory and meet the requirements of the awarding body. Initial assessment is inconsistent. Some learners have been tested for literacy and numeracy, but others have not. Some employers test all new job applicants, but many long-term employees have not been tested.

62. Learners are not always aware of the content of their electronic individual learning plans. Learners' copies of individual learning plans contain a lot of standard information and do not contain details such as literacy and numeracy skills test data or test results. These individual learning plans are not routinely updated. The electronic data held centrally by assa is very comprehensive and regularly updated. However, amendments to central records are communicated to learners verbally with no written confirmation. Proposed review dates and actual review dates are not always recorded on the individual learning plans. There is little information on individual learning plans to reflect the diverse experience, qualifications or job responsibilities of learners to enable the development of an individual learning strategy.

63. Arrangements for learners' progress reviews are unsatisfactory. There are a significant number of missed or delayed reviews and, where reviews have been carried out, they are insufficiently detailed and contain few challenging targets to aid the learners' progress. For some learners no reviews have taken place. Forward planning of reviews is unsatisfactory, with many learners and employers unsure when they will take place. Arrangements to quality assure reviews are inadequate and in many cases reviews are not filed in individual learners' files. Where targets have been set there is little evidence that they have been reviewed at the next visit.

### **Leadership and management**

64. Leadership and management of the BIT programme are effective. assa has developed strategies to deal with identified weaknesses such as slow progress and customer service, and employer information about reviews. There are frequent team meetings with detailed minutes and action plans. assa appraises its staff regularly and prepares and implements a detailed feedback report and action plan. The company observes tutors in the workplace and sends a detailed report to the training officer following such visits. Effective course evaluation is carried out after each formal training course, and improvements have been made as a result. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Learners are informed at induction of harassment, complaints and appeals processes. Many learners work in companies that have detailed policies and processes for equality and diversity. Learners have a good understanding of health and safety.

## Retailing, customer service & transportation

Retailing, customer service & transportation		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Warehousing and distribution</b> - Other government-funded provision	198	1

### Warehousing and distribution

#### Strengths

- excellent retention and achievement rates
- good links with supportive employers
- good support for learners

#### Weaknesses

- no significant weaknesses

### Achievement and standards

65. Retention and achievement rates are excellent. In 2001-02, achievement and retention rates were 88 per cent. In the following year these had both risen to 91 per cent. Learners complete their NVQ quickly and show good occupational skills.

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

Other government funded																	
	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	285		290		8												
Retained*	76		265	91	7	88											
Successfully completed	76		265	91	7	88											
Still in training	198		0	0	0	0											

\*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

## Quality of education and training

66. assa has good links with supportive employers. The company has developed effective links with a wide range of national and international employers. These employers often have good in-house training schemes, and have excellent quality assurance systems. Learners are working to a high standard and are using sophisticated technology. Managers value the opportunity to accredit learners' competence with a nationally recognised qualification. In some companies, learners are rewarded financially on completion of NVQ. Celebration events take place in other companies and successes are included in in-house magazines.

67. Support for learners is good. All assessors are occupationally experienced and competent and are well respected by the learners. Assessors are sympathetic to the needs of adult learners, many of whom are particularly apprehensive about starting a qualification so long after leaving school. Assessors put the learners at ease effectively and the learners speak highly of the support they receive. During the time they are on employers' premises, assessors become part of the team. Visits are timed to fit in with the demands of employers and the learners' shift patterns. Learners working on night shifts are afforded the same opportunities as those working normal daytime shifts. This flexible approach is very much appreciated by employees and employers alike.

68. Literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory. Learners receive Basic Skills Agency (BSA) tests at the start of their training programme. Learners with identified literacy, numeracy and language skills needs are offered the chance to participate in a proprietary programme designed to meet these needs. Those who do not take up this offer are given additional time by their assessor to complete their award. assa obtains professional translation services for those learners with language needs or makes informal arrangements with fellow employees. Any additional support given is not well recorded.

69. The induction process is satisfactory. All learners have an induction to their programme when they start. They are introduced to the NVQ and are given appropriate policies such as health and safety and equality of opportunity. They each complete BSA tests for literacy and numeracy. Most learners are able to recall the content of the induction. Most of the learners were happy with the pace of the induction, although for some it was too fast and they wanted to carry it out over a longer period of time. Prior to the start of the programme, assa performs a skills scan of all the operations carried out by potential learners to ensure that individual learners are put on the most appropriate NVQ.

70. Assessment practices are satisfactory overall. assa prepares a master portfolio of evidence relevant to the activities performed by all learners before starting assessment. This evidence is then cross-referenced to learners' portfolios. Learners are observed on three occasions and complete preset questions. Learners appreciate the fact that they are not required to collect vast amounts of additional evidence. Most learners understand how the master portfolio works, although some do not. Some evidence is poorly recorded; for example, observation reports are too brief and do not always reflect everything observed. When assessors record the learners' answers to knowledge

questions they do not always fully reflect the answers. However, all learners interviewed were very competent and experienced and operating well above the level of the NVQ.

### **Leadership and management**

71. Leadership and management within the area are good. Delivery staff are aware of assa's aims and values. Equality of opportunity is well promoted to learners and all of those interviewed have a good understanding of how legislation affects them. They have a good understanding of the potential for bullying and harassment in the workplace, and their broader rights and responsibilities. The appeals and complaints procedures are satisfactory and most learners are familiar with them. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process. The self-assessment report is largely accurate, and the inspectors agree with most of the strengths.