

INSPECTION REPORT

Asset Training and Consultancy Limited

16 June 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** 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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

Asset Training and Consultancy Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited is a private training provider based in Bootle, Merseyside. Founded in 1996, Asset Training and Consultancy became a limited company in 2004. It currently provides work-based learning for 371 learners in engineering, technology and manufacturing, business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health, social care and public services. It also offers foundation programmes. Hairdressing training is offered from a site in Southport.

2. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited employs 21 staff and uses six external consultants for specific training needs. The senior management team consists of two directors who have responsibility for all aspects of the company's day-to-day management. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited uses the services of three subcontractors, Alma Training, Horseshoe Training and Southport College.

3. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited funds its training for 218 learners through contracts with the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The Higher Workforce Skills programme, with 153 learners, is co-financed by the European Social Fund (ESF).

4. In February 2005, the unemployment rate was 5.2 per cent in Liverpool, compared with a national average of 2.3 per cent. However, in some wards the rate is up to 25 per cent. The 2001 census showed that the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups is 5.7 per cent in Liverpool, compared with the national average of 9.1 per cent. Liverpool is classed as an area of multiple deprivation, and ranks third in terms of disadvantage, out of 354 areas.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

5. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's leadership and management are satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Training is satisfactory in business administration, management and professional, retailing, customer service and transportation, hairdressing and beauty therapy, and health, social care and public services. Training in engineering, technology and manufacturing, and in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel is inadequate.

6. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process is highly inclusive and is used by Asset Training and Consultancy Limited to make appropriate judgements about its provision, and to help plan future activity through its development plan. The report is self-critical, but it takes insufficient account of the effect of the poor achievement and retention rates in some areas of learning. It does not cover the two subcontracted areas of learning, hospitality, sport, leisure and travel, and health, social care and public services.

7. The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.

Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has changed significantly since 2001 when it was last inspected. Trends in achievement and retention have remained low over the past three years, and the company has recently recognised this and taken a number of actions to improve them. There have already been improvements in the numbers of learners staying on programme and in the progress they are making. However, there has yet to be an improvement in the achievement rates.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ASSET TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY LIMITED:

- improve the rates of retention and achievement
- improve the use and effectiveness of individual learning plans and progress reviews
- continue to develop strategies for the effective integration of training for key skills qualifications and technical certificates with the vocational training programme
- continue to develop the assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills
- further develop the self-assessment process

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

Leadership and management		3
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

Engineering, technology & manufacturing			4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Manufacturing			
Apprenticeships for young people	32	4	
Other government-funded provision	13	2	

Business administration, management & professional			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Business administration			
Apprenticeships for young people	31	3	
Other government-funded provision	3	3	
Management			
NVQ training for young people	8	3	
Other contributory areas			
Apprenticeships for young people	14	3	

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing		
Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
Customer service		
Apprenticeships for young people	47	3
Other government-funded provision	33	2
Warehousing and distribution		
Apprenticeships for young people	3	3
Other government-funded provision	2	2
Lift-truck awards		
Other government-funded provision	2	2
NVQ training for young people	13	3

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel		4
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hospitality and catering		4
Apprenticeships for young people	16	4
Other government-funded provision	18	4

Hairdressing & beauty therapy		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Hairdressing		3
Apprenticeships for young people	23	3
Other government-funded provision	2	3

Health, social care & public services		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Care		
Apprenticeships for young people	27	3
Other government-funded provision	80	3
NVQ training for young people	1	3
Public services		
Apprenticeships for young people	2	3

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

8. Following a pre-inspection analysis of Asset Training and Consultancy Limited, most areas of learning offered were reported on and graded. Motor vehicle training was not reported on and graded as this is subcontracted to Southport College. Hospitality, sport,

leisure and travel, and health, social care and public services are also contracted out. However, as they are subcontracted to a provider that is not subject to inspection, they were included as part of this inspection. There were too few learners on foundation programmes for them to be reported on or graded separately.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	27
Number of learners interviewed	85
Number of staff interviewed	35
Number of employers interviewed	26
Number of subcontractors interviewed	13
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	2
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

9. **Retention, progression and achievement rates are good on the Higher Workforce Skills programmes in manufacturing, and in retailing, customer service and transportation.** In manufacturing, of the 31 learners who started the programme in 2003-04, 28 have been retained and 26 have successfully gained their qualification. Six customer service learners are about to achieve their national vocational qualification (NVQ) after only four months. Most of the others are on target to achieve their qualification much faster than originally planned.

10. Learners quickly develop **good personal and practical skills in business administration, customer service, and health and social care.** Learners' self-confidence grows quickly as they become more self-disciplined, learning to manage their time effectively and work under pressure. Many learners take on additional responsibility and develop wider job roles. They are helped to access a wide range of internal and external training to develop their skills in the workplace. Employers are pleased with the learners' skills and confirm that their work is improving.

11. Most learners are making satisfactory progress, and their practical and portfolio work is of a satisfactory standard. However, **learners in hospitality are making slow progress.**

12. **Retention and achievement rates for apprenticeship programmes are poor across all areas of learning except health, social care and public services.** In manufacturing, the achievement rate among learners who started in 2003-04 is 22 per cent and a further 16 per cent of learners are still in learning. In business administration it is 30 per cent, and 11 per cent are still in learning, and in customer service it is 22 per cent and 9 per cent are still in learning. However, retention rates are now showing an upward trend following the introduction of a number of initiatives by Asset Training and Consultancy Limited. Retention and achievement rates for adults on NVQ programmes are satisfactory.

The quality of provision

13. **Learners in manufacturing have a particularly good understanding of their qualification and learning programme.** They can confidently describe the structure and content of all parts of their qualification and know how they can be achieved.

14. **Learners receive particularly good individual support from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited in business administration, customer service, and health and social care.** Assessors visit learners at least fortnightly in the workplace to coach and assess them, and help them with portfolio-building. They respond specifically to individual learners' needs. Assessors are available by e-mail and telephone at any time, including evenings and weekends. They often accompany learners to medical appointments or job interviews, and give very effective counselling on pregnancy, finance and other personal issues. In health and social care, learners can access off-the-job training at nights and weekends to fit around their work and home commitments.

15. **Asset Training and Consultancy Limited works well with employers to plan learning in business administration, hairdressing, and health, social care and public services.** The company has good, long-standing links with a large number of employers, and has put much effort into ensuring a flexible programme that meets the needs of employers and learners. Throughout the programme, assessors meet learners' supervisors to discuss assessment, progress and any other issues. Supervisors have a good understanding of the framework and their learners' progress.

16. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited places a **strong focus on in-salon training for hairdressing learners.** Salon employers provide on-the-job practical training sessions to a good commercial standard in a wide range of hairdressing skills. Learners attend manufacturers' seminars designed to improve stylists' skills and knowledge in a variety of techniques.

17. **There are good systems for monitoring learners' progress in hairdressing and in health, social care and public services.** Information on learners' progress is shared with employers and learners to facilitate assessment planning and improve learners' progress reviews. In hairdressing, each learner has a chart in their portfolio to identify the units they have achieved and what further practical and background knowledge they still need. In health care, the subcontractor carefully and effectively monitors learners' progress, providing assessors with monthly data on their progress. However, **monitoring of learners' progress is inadequate in manufacturing and in business administration.** There is no record of when learners start or complete their NVQ units, key skills qualifications and training in employment rights and responsibilities, and there are different formats for recording their progress. There is no clear record of progress in learners' portfolios, and learners are not set clear and challenging targets.

18. **Individual learning plans are ineffective in customer service.** Many learners do not know what they are for, and the documents are often incomplete. There is no record of the initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language support needs, nor of planning of training and assessment. Learners are not set challenging targets.

19. **Target-setting at learners' progress reviews is weak in hairdressing.** Targets are not challenging to learners and have no specific dates for completion. Progress review

documents give the same target dates for all NVQ units, and some sections, such as educational achievement and additional learning needs, are not completed.

20. Most staff in health and social care have a limited understanding, knowledge or experience of the apprenticeship framework. They are unfamiliar with the employment rights and responsibilities element and with some aspects of the technical certificate. Training for key skills qualifications and technical certificates is not fully integrated with the learning programme. The subcontractor is aware of this and has recently introduced additional staff training and appointed an experienced member of staff to remedy it.

21. Some of the accommodation used for off-the-job training in health care is inappropriate. Quiet rooms are not always available and too much learning takes place in areas used by staff and visitors. However the subcontractor has very good training facilities with a good range of resources and equipment.

Leadership and management

22. The managing director of Asset Training and Consultancy Limited belongs to many key strategic partnerships, from where he obtains up-to-date local strategic information to assist in strategic and business planning. The company is one of the first in the area to be involved in the development of pre-apprenticeship training for school students. Its partnership arrangements are good. For example, it is working with a local college to develop joint arrangements for training and assessment in some programme areas. Managers also develop good practice by visiting other providers, particularly those with grade 1 provision.

23. The managing director sets individual targets for assessors and meets them regularly to review progress. This is a particularly effective system. Formal and informal communications between staff at all levels are good. Staff appreciate the open and consultative management style of both directors. Meetings are regular and purposeful. Staff awaydays are used very effectively to discuss and explore current issues.

24. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has an active approach to widening participation. The company has analysed its recruitment data and identified under-representation from some areas of significant social deprivation and high minority ethnic population. It has targeted these areas in order to increase participation rates. Although this has yet to have a significant effect on recruitment, Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has identified the value of these initiatives to the local community.

25. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited demonstrates **good actions to bring about continuous improvement.** Employers and subcontractors now have a very clear agreement that sets out their involvement in the planning and provision of training. Learners' reasons for leaving their programmes early are analysed in detail and risk assessments are made. Staff now give a higher priority to key skills training, which begins at the start of the programme for most learners. Directors support improvements by understanding the reasons for missed targets. Although it is too early to see the full effects of many of these initiatives in terms of achievement rates, fewer learners are leaving and most are making at least satisfactory progress.

26. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory.

Asset Training and Consultancy Limited does not have a clear strategy for this but recognises its importance. Assessors provide additional support in the workplace, though most are not qualified in literacy and numeracy support. Suitably qualified staff have recently been appointed to improve the level and quality of support available. There are local arrangements with external organisations to accommodate more specialised support needs.

27. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has revised its internal verification system and it is now well planned and clearly recorded, and continues to develop the assessment process.

28. **Target-setting for achievement is poor.** Managers have a very clear picture of how the company is performing against the achievement targets set by the funding body, and they know how they compare with other local training providers. However, they have underestimated the effect of low rates of achievement on the adequacy of their provision.

29. **There is poor access to one of the provider's sites for people with mobility difficulties.** There is no lift to the training rooms on the first floor and no toilet facilities that can accommodate people with mobility difficulties. The company is looking for new premises and has arranged with a local college to use its training facilities when necessary.

30. **Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's self-assessment report is incomplete.** Two of the seven areas of learning offered have been left out. The self-assessment process for the remaining areas of learning is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good external networking benefiting learners
- good use of individual staff reviews to improve performance management
- good strategic development of community initiatives to widen participation
- good actions for continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting for achievement
- poor physical access to one training centre
- incomplete self-assessment report

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Manufacturing

Grade 4

Strengths

- good rates of retention and achievement on the Higher Workforce Skills programme

Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement on apprenticeship programme

- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress in work-based learning

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good development of personal and professional skills
- good individual coaching for learners
- good work with employers in the planning of learning

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes
- ineffective planning and recording of individual learning

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- particularly good development of learners' skills
- very good progress by learners on Higher Workforce Skills programmes
- particularly good response to individual learning needs

Weaknesses

- poor rates of achievement in work-based learning
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Hospitality and catering

Grade 4

Strengths

- no significant strengths were identified

Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement for 2003-04
- insufficiently challenging targets for learners' progression

Hairdressing & beauty therapy

Hairdressing

Grade 3

Strengths

- strong focus on in-salon training
- good use of progress-monitoring systems to develop learners
- very effective links with employers

- continuous programme evaluation to improve the learning experience

Weaknesses

- poor rates of achievement
- inadequate initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills
- weak target-setting in progress reviews

Health, social care & public services

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- strong employer involvement in learning
- effective monitoring of learners' progress
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient understanding of the apprenticeship framework
- insufficient consideration of learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs when planning training
- inappropriate training venues for some learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ASSET TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY LIMITED:

- the support of the assessors - 'someone believing in you'
- the good facilities - 'Asset Training and Consultancy Limited really make an effort'
- learning new skills
- the friendly and supportive assessors
- 'getting a qualification for something I have done for years'
- the improvements in their confidence
- the time off the job to gain a qualification

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ASSET TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- the time taken to deal with problems with assessors
- the number of visits - so that learners make faster progress
- the facilities in the training centre
- the amount of training for the over 25s

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good external networking benefiting learners
- good use of individual staff reviews to improve performance management
- good strategic development of community initiatives to widen participation
- good actions for continuous improvement

Weaknesses

- poor target-setting for achievement
- poor physical access to one training centre
- incomplete self-assessment report

31. The managing director of Asset Training and Consultancy Limited belongs to many key strategic partnerships, including local and regional associations of learning providers. The company gathers up-to-date local strategic information to help it develop its strategic and business plans. It is one of first in the area to be involved in the development of pre-apprentice training for 14 - 19 year olds, and provides assessors to ensure that participants achieve some units of an NVQ. In response to low retention and achievement rates, Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has used its partnerships to good effect. It is developing joint working arrangements with a local college for training and assessment in some programme areas, and working with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) to provide TUC mentors to some learner groups. There are good partnership arrangements with employers, leading to good work placements and employment opportunities for learners. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited also develops good practice by visiting other providers, particularly those with grade 1 provision. It has been able to identify areas of weakness in its own provision, and to deal with them.

32. Individual staff reviews are used well to improve performance. The managing director recognised that staff meetings were not the best forum in which to identify shortcomings, or discuss and improve programme management, and introduced reviews to do this more effectively. They are used to identify and discuss any issues of concern, and are highly valued by staff. They have resulted in positive strategies to improve performance, such as the purchase of laptop computers and printers to help in teaching key skills in the workplace. The outcomes of the meetings are already having an effect on achievement rates, and, although these are still low, they are improving in all programme areas. Formal and informal communication between staff at all levels is good. Staff appreciate the open and consultative management style of both directors. Meetings, including monthly staff meetings, monthly management meetings and team briefings, are purposeful. Staff awaydays are used very effectively to discuss and explore current issues.

33. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited manages its resources satisfactorily. The ratio of staff to learners is good, and learners are visited frequently in their workplaces. Learning materials, equipment, facilities and furniture are mostly satisfactory. Managers recognise that the company's premises are in need of improvement and they are actively seeking

local alternatives.

34. The management of additional literacy, numeracy and language support is satisfactory. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited does not have a clear strategy for this but recognises its importance. A diagnostic assessment of learners' basic and key skills forms part of initial assessment. Assessors provide additional support in the workplace, though most are not qualified to teach literacy and numeracy. Suitably qualified staff have recently been appointed to improve the level and quality of support available. There are local arrangements with external agencies to accommodate learners with more specialised support needs.

35. Target-setting for achievement is poor. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited places too much emphasis on contractual targets for achievement. Managers have a very clear picture of how the company is performing against the targets set by the funding body, and know how the company's position compares with that of other local training providers. Management data shows that achievement rates at Asset Training and Consultancy Limited are generally higher than the LSC's average for the area. However, managers have failed to recognise that this level of achievement is too low and have underestimated the effect of low achievement rates on the adequacy of their provision. There is some effective use of data, for example to monitor the recruitment and progress of learners, and a range of valuable reports is produced. Retention rates have been recognised as an area of concern and actions have been taken to rectify them. However, during the inspection, Asset Training and Consultancy Limited struggled to provide a clear picture of the number of learners.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

36. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited is active in its approach to widening participation. Managers have analysed recruitment data and, as a result, targeted areas of significant social deprivation, and worked in partnership with minority ethnic communities to overcome under-representation. The company has provided regular guidance sessions on jobsearch, completing application forms, and preparing curriculum vitae, as well as help with basic literacy and numeracy. These initiatives have yet to have a significant effect on recruitment but Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has recognised their value to the local community. Further developments to this service are currently being negotiated between Asset Training and Consultancy Limited and other local training providers.

37. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, effectively promoted to all members of staff, but it makes insufficient reference to learners, and concentrates mainly on employment issues. The policy is discussed at learners' induction. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited collects information on the gender, ethnicity and disabilities of learners and uses it effectively in action-planning.

38. Training for staff is satisfactory. All staff attend internal training on equality and diversity, mainly given by the one of the directors and the equal opportunities officer. Past training activity has effectively focused on improving the use of progress reviews to monitor equality of opportunity, and improving the initial assessment process. Equality of opportunity is included as a standard agenda item at Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's staff meetings. All staff make every effort to meet the needs of individual learners, for example by helping them to choose and pay for clothing to wear for interviews. In order to meet the training needs of night shift workers, staff carry out assessments at any

time of the day or night.

39. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace is satisfactory. Training staff ask learners about equality of opportunity as part of their progress reviews. Most learners have at least a satisfactory awareness and understanding of equality and diversity. More specifically, some learners can discuss their rights and responsibilities and how to deal with issues such as bullying, harassment and discrimination as they relate to the working environment. On first contact with employers, staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited discuss in detail the employers' promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities, and emphasise the need for an effective policy. They check the employers' policies, then discuss them with the employers to ensure their understanding. Where employers do not have equal opportunities policies, Asset Training and Consultancy Limited provides guidance on developing a policy, or offers its own for the employer to use. Additional support has also been given to some employers to help remove barriers to training. For example, one employer was shown how to change the working environment to accommodate a learner in a wheelchair, and for another, the company translated a learner's individual action plan into Urdu.

40. There is poor access for people with mobility difficulties to one site used by the provider. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited occupies offices on the ground and first floors of a rented building. There are steps at the entrance to the building and a narrow staircase inside. There are training and interview rooms on the ground floor and the first floor of the building, but there is no lift. The company has recognised these problems and is in the process of looking for new premises. In the meantime, arrangements have been made to use the facilities of a local college when necessary. There are currently no toilets in the building that can be used by people with mobility difficulties.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

41. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has taken good action to bring about continuous improvement. Managers have recognised areas of concern and brought in initiatives to deal with them. A large number of learners have been transferred to the company at the LSC's request over the past 18 months. They came from a number of failing providers, where they had become demotivated and were not progressing. A better monitoring system has been introduced to ensure that the learners are on appropriate training programmes. Staff carry out a detailed analysis of the reasons why learners leave their programmes before they have achieved all the targets on their individual learning plan. They use a traffic light system to identify those most at risk of leaving early, and have made effective changes to individual learning plans and progress reviews to help with this. Agreements with subcontractors are now detailed and comprehensive, covering every aspect of the management of training and assessment including quality assurance, equal opportunities and progress monitoring. However, some subcontracts are still at an early stage and have not yet been subject to a full cycle of monitoring. The quality of induction has improved, with greater emphasis on roles and responsibilities in training. Employers now have a very clear agreement that sets out their involvement in the planning and provision of training. Staff give a higher priority to key skills training, which is now carried out from the start of the programmes for most learners. Directors help staff make improvements through the use of individual reviews. They acknowledge the reasons for missed targets and provide support for improvements. Fewer learners are now leaving early, and most are making at least satisfactory progress. Of the 371 learners who started training in 2004-05, 309 are still in learning and 22 have completed their learning

objectives. Achievement rates are still low, but they now show an improving trend across all occupational areas.

42. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has a comprehensive range of detailed policies and procedures, covering all aspects of quality assurance. There are internal audits of practice against these procedures, but the company recognises in its self-assessment report that this area needs further development. External consultants and staff from within the company carry out observations of key learning processes. Managers have identified that the observations carried out by external consultants are much more objective, and have arranged workshops to share good practice. Arrangements for internal verification are satisfactory. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has revised its internal verification system after identifying through the self-assessment process that improvements could be made in this area. Internal verification is now well planned and clearly recorded, and continues to develop the assessment process.

43. Staff development is satisfactory. Managers and staff are encouraged to identify training and development needs through the staff appraisal system. All staff have, or are working towards, qualifications in assessment, and an increasing number are working towards qualifications in training. Development needs are assessed in line with the needs of the business. Feedback from learners and employers is actively sought and evaluated, though learners' feedback is only gathered at the end of the programme.

44. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's self-assessment report is incomplete. The company offers seven areas of learning, but only five are included in the self-assessment report. The other two are subcontracted to another local training provider, Alma Training. Alma Training completed its own self-assessment of these areas, but this was not included in Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's report. No strengths or weaknesses were identified for these areas, nor grades awarded. The self-assessment process for the remaining areas of learning is satisfactory. It is highly inclusive and used to target areas for improvement.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 4

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Manufacturing		4
Apprenticeships for young people	32	4
Other government-funded provision	13	2

45. There are 32 young people on work-based learning programmes in engineering, technology and manufacturing, 17 of whom have employed status. Five are advanced apprentices, four of them on a motor vehicle programme. The motor vehicle programme was not inspected as this is subcontracted to Southport College. There are 27 apprentices working towards NVQs at level 2, either in performing manufacturing operations, installing information technology (IT) or in food and drink production. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited works with seven manufacturing companies and five IT companies, ranging from small to medium-sized. It recruits learners and matches them to suitable employers. Those who are already employed are put on the most appropriate learning programme for their job role, taking into account their prior knowledge and experience. The length of programme varies from 31 to 42 months for advanced apprentices and from 12 to 21 months for apprentices. Learners can join programmes at any time during the year. All learners have an initial induction and complete an individual learning plan. A further 13 learners are on an ESF-funded Higher Workforce Skills programme, working towards NVQs in food and drink manufacturing.

46. Most training takes place at work. Learners on the installing IT programme attend the training centre for off-the-job training on one day a week, and their progress reviews and assessments are usually carried out by an assessor from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited. Learners on programmes in performing manufacturing operations are assessed and their progress reviewed, either by staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited or by one of three staff from Horseshoe Training, the subcontractor for performing manufacturing operations. Internal verification for performing manufacturing operations is carried out by two internal verifiers from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited, and one from Horseshoe Training. Learners' work towards their key skills qualifications is assessed in the early stages of their apprenticeship by staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited.

Manufacturing

Grade 4

Strengths

- good rates of retention and achievement on the Higher Workforce Skills programme

Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement on apprenticeship programme
- inadequate monitoring of learners' progress in work-based learning

Achievement and standards

47. Retention and achievement rates are good on the Higher Workforce Skills programme. In 2003-04, 31 learners started the programme, of whom 28 have been retained and 26 achieved their qualification. One learner is still in training. In 2004-05, 26 learners started the programme, of whom four have already gained their qualification and a further 12 remain in training.

48. Learners acquire satisfactory practical skills. They are able to carry out tasks competently in the workplace to customers' requirements with minimal supervision. Many learners correctly and confidently operate hand tools and computer equipment and demonstrate a satisfactory awareness of safe working practices. Wherever possible, employers ensure that learners receive practical experience that can be linked to their qualification. These learners gain satisfactory skills and have a good knowledge of manufacturing and computer systems.

49. Retention and achievement rates for the apprenticeship programme are poor. The retention rate was 36 per cent in 2001-02, 47 per cent in 2002-03, and 31 per cent in 2003-04. Of the 162 learners who started on the programme between 2001-02 and 2004-05, only 43 have achieved their qualification and 27 are still in learning, giving a maximum possible achievement rate of 43 per cent. Between 2001-02 and 2003-04 the achievement rates for the NVQ training programme have averaged 61 per cent and retention rates have averaged 63 per cent. There are no learners on the NVQ training programme at present.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	0		10	100	1	100	0										
Retained*	0		3	30	0	0	0										
Successfully completed	0		3	30	0	0	0										
Still in learning	0		5	50	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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	28		45	100	78	100	11	100									
Retained*	5		14	31	37	47	4	36									
Successfully completed	5		10	22	27	35	1	9									
Still in learning	18		7	16	2	3	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																	
Other government-funded provision	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	26		31	100													
Retained*	4		28	90													
Successfully completed	4		26	84													
Still in training	12		1	3													

*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

The quality of provision

50. Teaching and learning on the IT programme are satisfactory. Sessions are planned and taught appropriately. Session plans are available and include aims, objectives, learning activity, resources, assessment opportunities, possible learning styles, and information on health and safety and equal opportunities. There is appropriate use of teaching and learning aids. The environment is suitable for learning. Learners are attentive and enjoy the practical sessions, but they are not all fully involved in the sessions that explore background knowledge and understanding. Each learner's training and development is recorded on a learning map that includes details of NVQ units, key skills and off-the-job training. The map also includes the planned dates of training sessions and assessments, but too little of this detail is recorded on the learners' individual learning plans.

51. Assessment practice is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the examining bodies. Learners are routinely observed, and assessment plans and records are completed appropriately. Learners receive detailed feedback on their assessments and they demonstrate a good understanding of the assessment process. Portfolios are well organised and the range of evidence presented is adequate.

52. Support for learners is satisfactory. Staff assess learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills at the start of the programme to identify any additional learning needs. Learners receive a three-day induction which they find informative and recall clearly. It covers topics such as health and safety, equal opportunities, learners' terms and conditions and an overview of the qualification structure. They also receive an induction into their work placements. Learners have a good understanding of their qualification and programme of learning. They describe with confidence the qualification they are following and how they will achieve it. They are able to explain clearly the structure of their qualification and are knowledgeable about what it requires. Learners who work unsociable hours or shift patterns have full access to assessment visits. Progress reviews are carried out at least every 12 weeks, and more frequently if necessary. They cover the learners' progress since the previous review, the on- and off-the-job training carried out, health and safety, and equality of opportunity. However, equality of opportunity is not covered in sufficient detail, and the targets set are not accompanied by specific and measurable outcomes. Employers' involvement is satisfactory, although some of the comments written on review documents are cursory. Learners receive appropriate support in preparation for key skills tests. Staff issue past examination papers to familiarise learners with the layout of the paper and enable them practise before they take the test.

53. Monitoring of learners' progress is inadequate. The monitoring documents use

symbols to show that learners have started or completed their NVQ units or key skills tests, or whether they have been taught their employment rights and responsibilities. They do not include dates, and are not used systematically by all assessors. Some assessors use different formats for recording learners' progress. A new system is currently being developed but is not yet fully established. There is no clear monitoring of progress in learners' portfolios. It is difficult to determine what has been achieved and what has yet to be achieved. Individual learning plans are not used effectively to record and monitor learners' progress.

Leadership and management

54. Staff appraisal and development are satisfactory. Staff performance is formally reviewed annually to establish objectives and identify training and development needs. Staff receive appropriate personal development to assist them in their job role and to meet organisational needs.

55. Communication is good. Team briefings are held each week and staff can use them to discuss concerns and seek support and advice from each other. They value this opportunity and feel it has helped to develop a team culture across the organisation. Formal staff meetings are held each month to discuss operational matters, including performance. Both sets of meetings are minuted and set accountable, timebound action points to follow up. Staff also attend regular and purposeful awaydays. Self-assessment has been a regular topic for discussion, as has business planning, allowing all staff to understand and contribute to these processes. Subcontractors also attend the awaydays and occupational standardisation meetings.

56. Learners have a good understanding and awareness of equal opportunities. They are aware of the equal opportunities, anti-harassment and bullying policies, and the complaints procedure. Learners understand how these policies protect them and how they are required to treat others in relation to gender, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation or religious belief. All learners know how to report any incident relating to equality of opportunity and feel confident in doing so should the need ever arise. They are fully aware that Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has a zero tolerance attitude towards any acts of discrimination.

57. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company's strategy ensures that it takes place throughout learners' programmes. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced. There are regular occupational standardisation meetings which are minuted and result in accountable, timebound action plans. However, there is insufficient use of data for quality improvement purposes. Data on staff performance is reviewed each month, but there are no targets or reviews of performance directly linked to improving the quality of training. Data is not used to plan quality improvement. The self-assessment report failed to recognise the two strengths and weaknesses in the area of learning that were identified during inspection. The areas identified as strengths by the provider were no more than normal practice.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Business administration</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	31	3
Other government-funded provision	3	3
<i>Management</i>		
NVQ training for young people	8	3
<i>Other contributory areas</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	14	3

58. Forty-five learners are following apprenticeship programmes in business administration, insurance, management and teambuilding, of whom 30 are apprentices and 15 are advanced apprentices. A further 11 learners are following NVQ programmes in team building at level 2 and management at levels 3 and 4. Three of the NVQ learners are following an ESF-funded programme in administration. Most learners are recruited through direct advertising, though a few are referred by Connexions or their employers. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited finds work placements for unemployed learners, with large local employers or small private companies. Learners have an initial assessment and induction at the start of their programme. Staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited visit them in their workplace for coaching, assessment and portfolio-building. Progress reviews are carried out every 12 weeks.

Strengths

- good development of personal and professional skills
- good individual coaching for learners
- good work with employers in the planning of learning

Weaknesses

- poor retention and achievement rates on apprenticeship programmes
- ineffective planning and recording of individual learning

Achievement and standards

59. Learners quickly develop good personal and practical skills in the workplace through coaching, mentoring and training. Their self-confidence grows quickly as they become more self-disciplined, learning to manage their time effectively and work under pressure. Most learners have the opportunity to attend a wide range of in-house and external job-related training in areas such as customer service, telephone skills, preventing money laundering, and specialist computer applications. Some of this training is externally accredited. Supervisors value the contribution learners make and expand their job roles and responsibilities as they become more able to cope and use their own initiative.

60. Retention and achievement rates for learners on NVQ programmes are satisfactory. For those who started in 2003-04, the retention rate is 77 per cent and the achievement rate is 15 per cent so far, with 54 per cent of learners still on programme.

61. Retention rates for apprentices are poor. The retention rate in 2002-03 was only 44 per cent, with a further 6 per cent of apprentices still in learning, and in 2003-04, it was 41 per cent, with 11 per cent still in learning. Eighty per cent of the learners recruited in 2004-05 remain on the programme. Achievement rates are also poor, but show a rising trend. Of the apprentices who started their programme in 2002-03, only 15 per cent have achieved their learning goals, though 6 per cent remain in learning. In 2003-04, 30 per cent of learners have already achieved frameworks and a further 11 per cent are still in learning. Most current learners are making good progress. Their portfolios are of a high standard and well presented. Progression is good. Several foundation learners have progressed onto apprenticeship programmes, and in the past two years, 52 per cent of the unemployed learners have gained jobs during, or on leaving, the programme or have moved on to higher-level programmes. The employed learners have been retained by their employers, and some have been promoted.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	2		14		17		8	100									
Retained*	0		2		7		2	25									
Successfully completed	0		1		2		0	0									
Still in learning	2		6		6		1	12									

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	30		27		52	100	27	100									
Retained*	1		11		23	44	19	70									
Successfully completed	1		8		8	15	2	7									
Still in learning	24		3		3	6	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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	3		13		19	100	5	100								
Retained*	0		10		6	32	1	20								
Successfully completed	0		2		2	11	0	0								
Still in learning	1		7		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																
Other government-funded provision	2004-05															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4															
Retained*	1															
Successfully completed	0															
Still in training	3															

*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

The quality of provision

62. Learners receive particularly good individual coaching from staff. Assessors visit them at least fortnightly in the workplace for coaching, portfolio-building and assessment. More frequent visits are often arranged to speed up progress where, for example, someone is moving on to another job. A group of demoralised learners who transferred from another provider have received particularly effective and intensive support and training, including extra time to complete their frameworks. Individual coaching sessions are well structured and are taught in an interesting and interactive manner by assessors, usually at the workplace. Assessors are available by e-mail and telephone at any time, including evenings and weekends. Assessors often accompany learners to medical appointments or job interviews, and give very effective counselling on pregnancy, finance and other personal issues. One of the assessors has a counselling qualification and background.

63. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has good and long-standing links with a large number of employers, and works well with them to plan learning. Staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited meet employers to discuss their needs, and carefully evaluate how a job role will match the requirements of the NVQ, before recruiting suitable candidates for interview. After the employer has taken on a learner, Asset Training and Consultancy Limited completes an initial assessment and induction in the workplace with the supervisor present. A learning map is used effectively to identify which training and experience will take place on the job and which will be provided by the assessor. The assessor meets the supervisor regularly throughout the programme to discuss assessment, progress and any issues. Supervisors have a good understanding of the apprenticeship framework and of their learners' progress. They appreciate the initial screening process and the good communications which exist with the company.

64. Induction and initial assessment are satisfactory. Asset Training and Consultancy

Limited gives each learner a thorough induction at their workplace into the framework requirements, the NVQ, health and safety and equal opportunities. The workplace supervisor is usually present. Learners feel well prepared for their programme. Many learners also receive a further, extensive workplace induction which covers terms and conditions, on-the-job coaching, and health and safety. All learners take a literacy and numeracy assessment and complete a learning styles questionnaire. Where additional needs are identified, diagnostic tests are given to indicate the level of support required. Key skills training is satisfactory. Staff and learners have access to good key skills resources on the company's support website. Appropriate support is given by assessors, several of whom have literacy and numeracy qualifications. However, key skills are not systematically discussed in progress reviews. Some evidence for key skills is taken from the NVQ portfolio, but it is not assessed or cross-referenced at the same time as the NVQ evidence. Employers are not aware of learners' progress in key skills.

65. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Most portfolios contain a variety of diverse evidence from the workplace, including direct observations by the assessor. Although learners are given constructive feedback on assessment decisions, this does not always state whether competence has been achieved. Witness testimonies by workplace supervisors are standardised, and most do not specify how competence was demonstrated.

66. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's planning and recording of individual training and achievement is ineffective. Individual learning plans are incomplete and do not form a comprehensive basis for planning training. The results of initial assessment of key and basic skills are not always recorded in enough detail. Target dates for completing individual components of the apprenticeship framework are all the same, and most individual learning plans contain no interim dates for achieving units, technical certificates or key skills qualifications. The individual learning plan is not referred to and updated after reviews to show progress or achievements. There is paperwork in learners' portfolios that shows which units or key skills they have started or achieved, but this information is not kept up to date centrally. There is insufficient recording and monitoring of progress in key skills. Although the learning map shows which aspects of training will take place on and off the job, there is no record to show when this has taken place and no accreditation of relevant on-the-job training. Targets set at reviews are not always specific or well recorded.

Leadership and management

67. The programmes are well planned and managed. Relationships with employers are good. There has been rigorous action-planning to improve the insurance provision transferred from another training provider. Learners and employers appreciate this. Team working and internal communications are effective. Staff development is good and staff get many opportunities to gain additional qualifications and attend awarding body meetings for updating. New assessors and trainers are well supported through mentoring, shadowing and training. Resources are satisfactory. Key skills resources are particularly good, and there is a wide variety of training materials and past papers on the company's support website, which can be remotely accessed by staff and learners. Web-based resources are gradually being developed for the NVQs. There is an adequate range of appropriate paper-based resources for NVQs and key skills, which can be booked out to learners on request.

68. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity, and feel well respected and protected from bullying and harassment. However, there is insufficient

reinforcement of equality of opportunity during learners' programmes.

69. Internal verification has been strengthened, and is effective in identifying poor practice and developing staff. Observations of trainers and assessors are being carried out and teaching and assessment practices are improving. There is good sharing of best practice at standardisation meetings.

70. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate, but the grades given were too generous and did not take sufficient account of the poor rates of achievement.

Retailing, customer service & transportation**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
Customer service Apprenticeships for young people Other government-funded provision	47 33	3 2
Warehousing and distribution Apprenticeships for young people Other government-funded provision	3 2	3 2
Lift-truck awards Other government-funded provision NVQ training for young people	2 13	2 3

71. One hundred and one learners are following programmes in retailing, customer service and transportation. Six are advanced apprentices, 40 are apprentices, 18 are NVQ learners, and 37 are on higher workforce programmes. Eighty are on programmes in customer service, one in retailing, five in distribution warehousing and stores, and the remaining 15 in specialised plant and machinery operations. Learners are employed in a range of companies from small local businesses to large national organisations. Others are not employed, but are on work placements in similar companies. On-the-job training is carried out by employers or work-placement providers, with off-the-job coaching carried out by assessors from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited in the workplace. All assessment is done in the workplace by qualified assessors with relevant occupational experience.

Strengths

- particularly good development of learners' skills
- very good progress by learners on Higher Workforce Skills programmes
- particularly good response to individual learning needs

Weaknesses

- poor rates of achievement in work-based learning
- ineffective use of individual learning plans

Achievement and standards

72. Development of learners' skills is particularly good. Learners enhance their job skills during their time on programme, and significantly improve their personal skills. They become much more confident in their job roles, more focused on their work responsibilities and customer service roles, and greatly improve their telephone and customer communication skills. Many learners take on additional responsibility, such as deputising for supervisors in their absence. They chair team meetings, make presentations to other departments and coach new members of staff. Many also successfully carry out management tasks such as collating sales statistics. Some learners have developed wider

job roles within their workplaces. This strength was not recognised in the self-assessment report.

73. Learners on Higher Workforce Skills programmes make very good progress towards achievement. This was a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Six learners are close to achieving their NVQ having started the programme less than four months ago. Most of the remaining learners are on target to achieve their qualification in half the time allowed by the learning contract. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has agreed a six-month timescale for achievement with these learners, and assessors support and motivate them to meet this.

74. Learners' work is satisfactory. Evidence in portfolios is of a suitable quality, and a sufficiently wide range. Key skills project evidence is also of an appropriate standard, based on realistic and relevant tasks connected with learners' work activities.

75. Retention and achievement rates in work-based learning are poor. The average achievement rate for apprentices in the three years to 2003-04 was 24 per cent. The average retention rate over the same period was significantly higher at 52 per cent. The number of learners remaining on programme has shown a marked improvement to 79 per cent in the past year. Achievement of NVQs by learners on apprenticeship programmes has varied between 40 and 79 per cent. Some learners are making slow progress with key skills and technical certificates, and a few who have been on programme for two months or more have only just started work on them. Some learners do not know how close they are to completing these programme components. This weakness was partially recognised in the self-assessment report.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	4		7	100	12	100	7	100									
Retained*	1		4	57	4	33	2	29									
Successfully completed	1		2	29	1	8	0	0									
Still in learning	3		2	29	1	8	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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02										
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	45		58	100	57	100	42	100									
Retained*	7		24	41	30	53	26	62									
Successfully completed	7		13	22	16	28	10	24									
Still in learning	34		5	9	1	2	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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	21		25		15	100	35	100								
Retained*	3		7		4	27	13	37								
Successfully completed	3		7		3	20	9	26								
Still in learning	17		1		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																
Other government-funded provision	2004-05															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	44															
Retained*	2															
Successfully completed	1															
Still in training	37															

*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

The quality of provision

76. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited responds particularly well to individual learning needs. Assessors carry out frequent visits to learners, the number reflecting each learner's individual assessment and support requirements. One group of learners, who were demotivated by their poor experience with another training organisation, are visited particularly often to support them and help them achieve their qualification. Learners and supervisors place a high value on this additional support. Assessors have adopted a very flexible visit pattern to assist learners at a large national organisation, fitting around their part-time working patterns. Learners receive support from their assessor in negotiating wider relevant job experience with their managers. Assessors spend a good deal of time and effort in ensuring that learners fully understand all aspects of their programme. Learners know they can contact their assessor at any time for help and support by mobile telephone, e-mail and sometimes on their home telephone numbers. Many learners also receive a good deal of encouragement and support from their employers, who help source and present evidence for portfolios and provide time to do NVQ work in the workplace. Learners at one major employer have access to its training room to work on their portfolios of evidence. This strength was partially recognised in the self-assessment report.

77. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Learning sessions observed during inspection were well planned and resourced, with appropriate session plans and materials for learners' use. Learners are positively involved in the learning process, with trainers and instructors checking their understanding and learning at intervals during sessions. Resources for learning are satisfactory, with some good use of IT to assist the learning process. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has an NVQ support website, and provides learners with CD-ROMs containing session notes, copies of training presentations, and knowledge quizzes. All staff are appropriately qualified, and have suitable occupational experience. In some cases, however, this experience was some time in the past, and they have not had

any recent occupational updating. Staff and managers are aware of this and it is now included in staff development plans.

78. Induction and initial assessment are satisfactory. All learners have an individual induction session at which assessors guide them through their induction information pack. This includes details of the NVQ process, appeals procedure, health and safety, and equal opportunities. Most learners, however, have only a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. During initial assessment all learners complete an occupational skills assessment related to their NVQ. Most also take a literacy and numeracy assessment. One member of staff is qualified in basic skills support, and trained in dyslexia awareness.

79. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessors plan and arrange all visits and activities with learners in advance. Assessors' observations are recorded in detail and referenced to qualification standards, and learners are given written feedback. Verbal feedback, however, is sometimes brief and not sufficiently detailed. Good use is made of short-term targets for learners. Progress reviews are thorough, with set review dates recorded in individual learning plans. Reviewers monitor all aspects of the learners' programme and job role, often in the presence of learners' managers. However, little use is made of medium-term targets or of individual learning plans as a reference point for learners' progress.

80. Programmes meet learners' needs satisfactorily. All learners are following qualifications that are relevant to their job roles, and meet their current and near future career aspirations. Programmes also meet employers' needs, and mirror the activities of their core business, as well as complying with the requirements of awarding bodies.

81. Individual learning plans are not being used effectively. Many learners either are not aware of their existence or do not understand their content and purpose, and the documents themselves are often incomplete. Target achievement dates for NVQ units are all identical. Plans do not record the results of initial assessments of literacy, numeracy and language support needs, or give details of planned training and assessment. Learning plans are not routinely used by assessors as a way of helping learners to fully understand their qualification, and driving their progress toward its achievement. This weakness was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

82. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited enjoys good communications and working relationships with its client employers. Staff performance is monitored through regular meetings with senior managers, and other operational issues and problems are discussed at weekly team meetings. A detailed appraisal system is in place, and staff are encouraged to develop their work skills through relevant training and other development activities. Resources for learning are satisfactory, although learners in customer service who are not taking technical certificates are provided with few learning materials to help develop their background knowledge and understanding.

83. Equality of opportunity is included in all learners' induction sessions, but learners' understanding is at best satisfactory. Accommodation at the company's training centre is not particularly conducive to learning, and access for learners with limited mobility is restricted. The company is, however, planning to move to better accommodation, and has already evaluated a number of premises.

84. Internal verification is satisfactory. Internal verifiers hold regular standardisation meetings with assessors, and a number of improvements have been made to the reporting and recording systems. Staff are guided by a detailed internal verification procedure, and there is frequent sampling of assessors' decisions, although sampling plans are not very detailed. Assessors are observed twice a year and a sample of learners is interviewed by internal verifiers, with appropriate records kept. Full details of standardisation meetings are not yet fully routinely recorded, although this was recommended by the external verifier.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel**Grade 4**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hospitality and catering</i>		4
Apprenticeships for young people	16	4
Other government-funded provision	18	4

85. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited offers hospitality apprenticeships and NVQs at levels 2 and 3 in food and bar service, food preparation and cooking, housekeeping, reception and hospitality supervision. The provision is wholly subcontracted to a local training provider, Alma Training. There are 34 learners, of whom nine are apprentices, seven are advanced apprentices and 18 are NVQ learners. Learners working towards NVQs are on a Higher Workforce Skills programme, funded by the ESF. Nineteen of the learners are men. All learners are employed in a range of businesses including holiday camps, restaurants, public houses, contract catering firms and hotels. They are visited in the workplace for assessment and progress reviews by staff from Alma Training. Learners attend the subcontractor's premises for off-the-job training for the technical certificates. Initial assessment, induction and key skills development take place at the learners' places of work. The area of learning has a full-time contract manager, and at the subcontractor there is a full-time manager, three full-time assessors and an internal verifier.

Hospitality and catering**Grade 4***Strengths*

- no significant strengths were identified

Weaknesses

- poor rates of retention and achievement for 2003-04
- insufficiently challenging targets for learners' progression

Achievement and standards

86. Learners' practical skills and background knowledge are satisfactory. Their portfolios contain a broad range of evidence such as work products, photographs, witness testimonies, personal statements, professional discussions and observations.

87. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices were poor in 2003-04. The advanced apprentices all left their programme without completing any part of their qualification. One of the eight apprentices has been retained but has yet to achieve the qualification. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited was asked to take over this contract from another provider. Three learners from the original provider are still in learning. The learners were demotivated and Asset Training and Consultancy Limited decided to change the subcontractor in December 2004. All the learners who have started programmes in 2004-05 are employed and remain in learning.

88. Short- and medium-term targets are not sufficiently well used to motivate learners to achieve their qualifications. When targets have been set, they are not sufficiently

demanding, and if they are missed there is little investigation into the reasons why. Learners are making slow progress. Fifty-nine per cent of apprentices have been on programme for between four and six months, and some for longer, yet they have not achieved any NVQ units, technical certificates, key skills qualifications or the employers' rights and responsibilities component of their frameworks. These have been introduced at a late stage in the programme. Work-based projects for key skills are currently in development. Employers' rights and responsibilities has not been tackled, and the first technical certificate training took place during the week of inspection. There is a similar picture for learners on the Higher Workforce Skills scheme. Sixty-one per cent have been on programme for three to six months and have achieved no units of their NVQ.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	7		1														
Retained*	0		0														
Successfully completed	0		0														
Still in learning	7		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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	8		8														
Retained*	0		1														
Successfully completed	0		0														
Still in learning	8		1														

*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																	
Other government-funded provision	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	18																
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in training	18																

*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

The quality of provision

89. Learners receive satisfactory on-the-job training and are given time at work to develop their portfolios. Workplaces are of a satisfactory standard, offering learners a supportive

environment for personal development and assessment opportunities towards their qualifications. Learners are included in workplace teams and given roles and responsibilities that promote confidence and develop their skills. Some employers have their own in-house training programmes which learners attend. Training and learning is satisfactory and meets the needs of the individual learners and their qualifications. A satisfactory induction is carried out in the workplace, and covers equality of opportunity, health and safety and the structure and content of the qualification framework. There are adequate arrangements for the initial assessment of learners' literacy, numeracy and key skills at induction. Paper- and information and communications technology (ICT)-based key skills assessments are used to identify learners' current competence level. The assessor provides additional support, according to individual needs, through individual coaching in the workplace or referral to a specialist support agency. Learners enjoy the practical aspects of their work, and gain accreditation for the skills and knowledge they have developed over many years at work. Resources are of industry standard and meet learners' reasonable needs.

90. There is satisfactory support for learners on all programmes. Staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited and the subcontractor work closely together and with employers to support learners on their programme. All learners have immediate access to their tutors and assessors, for example by mobile telephone, and have regular and frequent visits in the workplace that fit around their shift patterns. There are good working relationships between all parties. Progress reviews are satisfactory and include comments from the learner, the employer and staff from Alma Training, but they make insufficient use of the individual learning plan.

Leadership and management

91. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited began new subcontracting arrangements in December 2004. A comprehensive service level agreement is in place, and is closely monitored. There are regular formal and informal communications to monitor the subcontractor's performance. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the rate of progress made by learners. All staff are well qualified with appropriate vocational qualifications and experience, and some hold teaching qualifications. Two of the three assessors recruited earlier this year are working towards their assessor qualifications with guidance and support from their internal verifier.

92. Many learners show a good understanding of the practicalities of equality of opportunity and diversity within their job roles, and have applied this knowledge effectively at work, by ensuring that their staff and colleagues are treated fairly. Learners receive equal opportunities training at inductions and this is reinforced at reviews. The subcontractor's premises are easily accessible by learners with mobility difficulties.

93. Internal verification is satisfactory with a sampling plan for assessors' judgements, observations of assessment practice, and interviews with learners. Assessors receive written feedback and action points on their judgements. Learners' portfolios include a record of internal verification activity. Standardisation meetings are effective in improving the quality of assessment. However, some aspects of staff training do not equip new staff with sufficient practical skills to enable them to fulfil their job roles effectively. For example, new assessors do not shadow experienced colleagues as part of their assessor training. The hospitality programme was not included in the self-assessment report, but Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's recent monitoring activity has identified some of the same areas

of weakness as were identified by the inspector.

Hairdressing & beauty therapy**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Hairdressing</i>		3
Apprenticeships for young people	23	3
Other government-funded provision	2	3

94. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited provides hairdressing training in and around Southport and Crosby. On-the-job training takes place at 20 hairdressing salons. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited provides a day of off-the-job training in background knowledge and key skills at its training centre in Southport, approximately every eight weeks. There is a rolling schedule of one-day training sessions covering the background knowledge for each NVQ unit. Learners attend additional key skills support sessions, according to their needs. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and NVQs at levels 2 and 3, in both hairdressing and barbering. Advanced apprentices also work towards a technical certificate. Apprenticeships are planned to take 24 months, and advanced apprenticeships 36 months. There are 25 learners on hairdressing training programmes, of whom 19 are apprentices taking NVQs at level 2, and three are advanced apprentices taking NVQs at level 3. Two are on ESF-funded NVQ programmes at level 2. One advanced apprentice is working towards the framework in barbering. All learners are employed in hairdressing salons. There are two male learners. Two staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited teach, assess and internally verify the hairdressing programmes. Key skills support is provided by a qualified key skills trainer and assessor. All assessments take place in the learners' salons and are carried out by staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited and work-based assessors in the salons. Five new work-based assessors are currently working towards their assessor qualifications.

Hairdressing**Grade 3***Strengths*

- strong focus on in-salon training
- good use of progress-monitoring systems to develop learners
- very effective links with employers
- continuous programme evaluation to improve the learning experience

Weaknesses

- poor rates of achievement
- inadequate initial assessment of literacy, numeracy and language skills
- weak target-setting in progress reviews

Achievement and standards

95. Rates of achievement are poor. Up to the end of May 2005, only one learner had achieved an apprenticeship framework. A second learner completed the full framework

ASSET TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY LIMITED

requirements during the inspection and a further six are on target to complete during the next two months, within the planned learning time. The learners' practical and portfolio work is satisfactory. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited provides learners with the opportunity to visit national hairdressing exhibitions and competitions. The length of time learners stay on programmes is improving. Of the four learners who started programmes in 2002-03, none achieved and only one remains in learning. In 2003-4, 22 learners started and eight remain in learning. During the current year, of the 21 learners who started programmes, 15 remain in learning. This was partially recognised in the self-assessment report.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	3		4	100	3	100											
Retained*	0		0	0	0	0											
Successfully completed	0		0	0	0	0											
Still in learning	2		1	25	1	33											

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03												
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	16		18	100	1	100											
Retained*	0		2	11	0	0											
Successfully completed	0		1	6	0	0											
Still in learning	12		7	39	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																	
Other government-funded provision	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	2																
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in training	2																

*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

The quality of provision

96. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited places a strong focus on in-salon training. Salon employers offer on-the-job practical training sessions to a good commercial standard. They also reinforce background knowledge, while training learners in the full range of

current hairdressing skills. Learners are encouraged to participate in in-house training provided for qualified staff. They attend manufacturers' seminars on topics such as colouring products and techniques. Each salon is issued with an employer file which contains a detailed service level agreement. The agreement effectively ensures their commitment to the apprenticeship programme, including training and assessment. It also includes suggested milestones and target dates for unit completion by each learner. This enables the salons to carefully plan on-the-job training to meet the training and assessment needs of individual learners. This strength was recognised in the self-assessment report.

97. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited makes good use of its system for monitoring learners' progress. Staff regularly update performance details and share this information with employers and learners to facilitate assessment planning and learners' progress reviews. Salon employers can also use it to identify the areas in which learners need practical training and additional experience. All learners are currently making steady progress towards their NVQ. Many have achieved five or six units within 12 months of starting their programmes. Progress in key skills is also monitored, but although assessments are well underway, no full key skills units have yet been completed. Each learner has a chart in their portfolio that identifies the units they have achieved and the further practical and background knowledge assessments they need for the incomplete units. The chart is routinely referred to during salon training sessions and assessments.

98. The working relationships between Asset Training and Consultancy Limited and the salons are very effective and were recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report. Managers at Asset Training and Consultancy Limited consider work-based learning and assessment a high priority. Much effort has been put into devising a flexible programme that meets the needs of employers and learners. The salons work closely with staff from Asset Training and Consultancy Limited, who contact and visit each salon frequently to carry out assessments and provide support to the salon trainers. There is regular discussion about learners' progress but this is not particularly well recorded. Two salons employ a work-based assessor, and a further five salon supervisors are currently working towards their assessor qualifications.

99. All teaching sessions observed during the inspection were graded satisfactory or better. Off-the-job training in background knowledge takes place at the training centre, but the centre has no training salon where learners can practise and develop their practical hairdressing skills. Learners only attend the sessions that are appropriate to their needs. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited sends out NVQ unit learning materials to learners before they attend off-the-job training sessions, to support their background knowledge learning. Learners take the NVQ unit tests set by the awarding body during the off-the-job training. Key skills support sessions are stimulating, interesting and relevant to learners' hairdressing tasks. There are lesson plans for each off-the-job training session, but although they identify broad learning aims, they do not specify the learning outcomes expected. Staff who teach, assess or verify on the hairdressing programmes are suitably qualified and have good industrial experience. There is informal evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme with learners and employers, but it is neither systematic nor recorded. The facilities at the training centre are satisfactory, but they are cramped and have little natural daylight. Tuition blocks are available for staff to use in demonstrations, and for learners to practise some basic hairdressing techniques. There is no rest area for learners.

100. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessors provide helpful verbal and written

feedback, and assessment records are comprehensive, clear and up to date. Assessments are planned and learners have a clear understanding of the process. They are aware that they can request assessment at any time and they make use of the service. They have a good understanding of the assessment appeals process.

101. Although an initial assessment is carried out at the beginning of their programmes, learners' basic literacy and numeracy skills are not routinely assessed. This was identified as a weakness in Asset Training and Consultancy Limited's self-assessment report. Some improvements have been introduced but only learners starting their programmes during the past two months have taken a basic skills assessment. Currently, no learners have identified additional learning needs in literacy and numeracy.

102. There is weak target-setting in learners' progress reviews. Learners are not set short-term targets to be achieved by the following review. Learners and employers do not agree the specific skills and activities to be practised to become competent. The progress reviews mainly cover pastoral topics. Any targets set are not challenging to learners and have no specific dates for completion. There is little use of the progress review document to encourage or improve short-term achievement. However, the NVQ progress monitoring system compensates for this to some extent and is the key factor in motivating learners to achieve. The progress reviews identify potential difficulties in the workplace and include contributions both from learners and from employers. The review document provides some opportunity for the discussion of equal opportunities and health and safety. Individual learning plans give the same target dates for all NVQ units and are not updated when units are achieved. Some sections, such as educational achievement and additional learning needs, are left incomplete. This was not fully recognised in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

103. Programmes are continuously evaluated, and this is leading to improvement. Asset Training and Consultancy Limited has already begun to deal with some of the weaknesses it has identified, including poor retention and achievement rates among the earlier intakes. It has improved the progress monitoring system and introduced an employer file. The rate of progress is improving. There have also been improvements in the vetting of new salons, and closer working relationships with salon trainers. Evaluation has been informal, mainly through discussion with learners and employers, and has not been recorded. Although the retention rates are improving, achievement rates remain low. The managing director meets the hairdressing manager each month to discuss and review target dates for the achievement of NVQs and apprenticeship frameworks. Key skills training was identified in the self-assessment report as an area requiring improvement, and workshops for hairdressing apprentices have been introduced in recent months to deal with this. The hairdressing manager is actively involved in quality improvement. The good communication with salons and the checks on new salons ensure that employers provide consistent work-based learning opportunities. Parts of this strength were recognised in the self-assessment report.

104. Learners have a limited understanding of equal opportunities. They do not remember whether equality of opportunity was covered during their induction programmes. Although the subject is raised during learners' progress reviews, the questions and responses are limited and broad. There are currently two men on hairdressing programmes, and an apprenticeship in men's barbering is offered as an alternative to the apprenticeship in

hairdressing.

105. Internal verification was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report. At the time it was written there was no internal verifier. This has now been resolved and an effective system of internal verification is in place. Verification takes place regularly, visits are planned, and reports are produced which cover most aspects of the assessment process. Internal verifiers observe assessors and give good and detailed feedback. They check that the actions they have recommended are complied with. An internal verifier observes work-based assessors in the workplace and provides a written record of the feedback given. There is a long-term sampling plan and overall monitoring document.

Health, social care & public services**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Care		
Apprenticeships for young people	27	3
Other government-funded provision	80	3
NVQ training for young people	1	3
Public services		
Apprenticeships for young people	2	3

106. There are currently 110 learners in this area of learning, of whom 108 are following care programmes and two are working towards qualifications in public service. Twenty-one are apprentices, eight are advanced apprentices, and one is following an NVQ programme. Eighty learners are on Higher Workforce Skills programmes funded through the ESF. Of these, 52 are following an NVQ at level 2 and 28 an NVQ at level 3. There are 20 male learners and 16 learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. All learners are employed, working in nursing and residential homes, in domiciliary care and in the fire service. Learners can start their training at any time, and it takes place in the workplace. This provision is all subcontracted to a local training provider, Alma Training.

Strengths

- good development of workplace skills
- strong employer involvement in learning
- effective monitoring of learners' progress
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- insufficient understanding of the apprenticeship framework
- insufficient consideration of learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs when planning training
- inappropriate training venues for some learners

Achievement and standards

107. Learners develop very good workplace skills. Initial assessment matches learners' experience, qualifications and interests to their training. Learners can select optional units relevant to their future ambitions and their work role, and access a wide range of training to develop their skills in the workplace. Many learners have attended training on infection control, which they have been able to apply in the workplace and to their NVQ. Learners speak knowledgeably about health and safety legislation as it applies to them in the workplace. They can explain the effect that age-related illness can have upon individual independence. They develop a good understanding of the vocational skills that support their work, and demonstrate good skills in the workplace. Learners are required to plan and carry out daily activities for their service users. They can explain the reasons for particular tasks and their benefits for the people they are working with. Employers are pleased with the skills the learners are developing, and report that their work is improving.

108. Few learners leave the programme early. All the 27 learners who started apprenticeships in 2004-05, remain in learning, as do 80 of the 81 learners who started on the Higher Workforce Skills programme. Learners are making good progress towards the achievement of their qualification. Most learners started in January 2005 and have achieved a substantial part, up to 95 per cent, of their qualification. Two learners started on this programme in 2003-04 after being transferred from another provider without any achievement. They are also making good progress.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	6		2														
Retained*	0		0														
Successfully completed	0		0														
Still in learning	6		2														

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	21																
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in learning	21																

*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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
NVQ Training	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	1																
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in learning	1																

*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																	
Other government-funded provision	2004-05																
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	81																
Retained*	0																
Successfully completed	0																
Still in training	80																

*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

The quality of provision

109. Employers are closely involved in the learning process. The communications systems between employers, learners and the subcontractor are effective and open, ensuring that learners make good progress and have appropriate workplace opportunities to complete their qualification. Learners are helped by their employers and the subcontractor to move to other nursing homes to meet identified specialist learning needs or interests. Employers are fully informed of all aspects of the learners' programme. They understand the NVQ programme and ensure that learners can carry out the practical aspects of the award. For example, one learner was moved to another part of the nursing home she was working in to give her experience of looking after clients with pressure areas. Employers, learners and training staff work closely to ensure that the learners' work roles enable them to make good progress. Learners' rotas are planned to meet assessment and training needs. Learners negotiate time for training within their working day and employers provide specific off-the-job training and assessment. Good employer involvement means that learners with specific difficulties are supported at work.

110. The subcontractor, Alma Training, monitors learners' progress carefully and effectively, providing assessors with monthly data on the progress of their learners. This is displayed in graphical format in the staff room of the training centre. Thorough progress reviews are carried out every 12 weeks by the internal verifiers. Employers are fully involved in the process and are given a detailed progress and attendance report on the learner. Managers comment on the quality of the programme and the effect it is having on the standard of learners' practical work. Learners review all aspects of their programme, including health and safety, equality of opportunity and the quality of the learning experience. Assessors visit the workplace at least every three weeks to monitor progress, check and reinforce learning, and set challenging targets. Learners are motivated to achieve and progress in learning. Many learners on the Higher Workforce Skills programme have progressed from NVQs at level 2 to NVQs at level 3. Most of these learners are mature and have not been in education for many years. Some learners also plan to progress into nursing training. All the employers interviewed were pleased at the progress made by their learners and identified that the pace at which learners progressed was enabling them to meet government minimum standards targets. Most learners on Higher Workforce Skills programmes are on target to complete their NVQ within six to eight months. They work at their own pace and can progress quickly where appropriate. Assessors give appropriate advice and guidance on progression opportunities and on how learners can use their qualifications. For example, a learner who was planning to move from elderly care to care of children was given advice about accreditation of prior learning, possible training providers and the careers support and guidance available.

111. Learners receive good support to attend and remain in learning. Off-the-job training is provided at a time that fits in with learners' work and home commitments, and many learners are given individual teaching to meet specific needs. For example, learners on night duty are trained and assessed at night. Others can access off-the-job training at weekends and early mornings, or before beginning an evening shift. Venues and group sizes are adapted to meet learners' individual needs, often in response to feedback. The subcontractor organised individual coaching for one learner who was embarrassed by her low literacy level. Assessors collect learners and take them back to work to enable them to attend training. Learners have very good access to their assessors and can contact them at any time by e-mail, telephone or text messaging. Learners report that they always receive a prompt reply. The subcontractor makes good use of arrangements with other agencies, helping learners access information and advice on topics such as housing benefits and childcare support. Learners receive good information on career opportunities and the accreditation of prior learning.

112. Lessons are planned and taught well. There are clear schemes of work and structured assessment activities. Tutors use questioning effectively to assess and promote learning. Assessments are challenging and enable learners to demonstrate their skills and identify future learning needs. Assessments take place regularly and are planned by the learner and the assessor. Portfolios are well presented and learners take pride in preparing their work. Assessors make sound judgements using written and oral questions, case studies and written accounts. Learners have access to enough up-to-date books and other resources in the workplace, but they have limited access to ICT. Staff are appropriately qualified and have recent relevant vocational experience.

113. The induction programme for learners is satisfactory. Learners are given a clear explanation of the NVQ and the requirements of the programme but receive little information about the apprenticeship framework.

114. Most staff do not have enough understanding, knowledge or experience of the apprenticeship framework. They are unaware of the requirements of some aspects of the technical certificate such as employment rights and responsibilities, which is an integral part of the qualification. Training for key skills qualifications and technical certificates is not fully integrated with the learning programme. Some learners who have been on the programme for six months have not started to collect evidence for these elements of their programme. NVQ units are not cross-referenced to key skills or the technical certificate. Most learners have little knowledge of key skills, employers' rights and responsibilities, or the technical certificate, and some did not know that they were on an apprenticeship programme. Employers have a limited understanding of the requirements of the framework and a few are only interested in learners achieving the qualification that meets legislative requirements. The subcontractor is aware of this, and in order to deal with it, has recently introduced additional staff training and appointed an experienced member of staff.

115. Learners are assessed for their literacy, numeracy and language support needs, but the results are not used effectively to develop individual learning plans. Targets set in learning plans and at progress reviews do not make sufficient reference to literacy, numeracy and language skills. Progress towards improving these skills is not recorded. Most staff have limited experience and qualifications in supporting learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. Learners for whom English is an additional language are

helped to access support from local colleges and other experienced subcontractors.

116. Some of the accommodation used for off-the-job training is inappropriate. Identified quiet rooms are not always available and too much learning takes place in areas used by staff and visitors. For example, at one venue, learning took place in the reception area where visitors were arriving, telephones were being answered and a staff handover was taking place. Other venues include a large office where staff are working while training takes place, and a client's bedroom. One location visited was very cold and both the learner and the assessor had some difficulty in concentrating. However, some employers have dedicated training rooms with a good range of resources. In most cases, if there are no adequate training rooms, the employer works with the subcontractor to identify more appropriate venues. The subcontractor has very good training facilities with a good range of resources and equipment which learners use well.

Leadership and management

117. Subcontracting arrangements are managed appropriately. A clear and well-written service level agreement covers all aspects of the learners' experience. Arrangements for monitoring the subcontractor are clear and include observations of the learning process. However, these have not yet taken place. There are frequent, well-documented meetings between Asset Training and Consultancy Limited and the subcontractor to monitor learners' progress, recruitment and retention.

118. All staff are trained on equality and diversity, particularly the effects of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Equality of opportunity is covered satisfactorily at learners' induction and during progress reviews. Learners have a good understanding of the complaints procedure and are confident about using it should the need arise.

119. Feedback from learners and employers is collected through progress reviews and end-of-programme evaluations. It is used to review and, where necessary, amend the content or structure of training. For example, one employer requested specific training for staff on dementia. A new assessor has been appointed with experience in this area and a new training programme has been planned. Internal verification of the programmes is satisfactory. It takes place every two months and is planned for the year. Internal verifiers observe assessors three times a year and three times in the first three months of their employment, giving detailed feedback and advice. Assessors meet their allocated internal verifier every month to discuss any issues relating to the award and to consider learners' progress. Team meetings are held every two months to enable staff to discuss assessment and verification and to share good practice.

120. The self-assessment report for Asset Training and Consultancy Limited did not cover health, social care and public services. The self-assessment report provided by the subcontractor was too general and missed out many of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the inspectors.

