

**Inspection dates** 2–5 February 2016

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Traineeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- The proportion of apprentices who successfully achieve their full qualification is consistently high. The large majority of apprentices achieve within the planned time.
- Almost all learners who enrolled in 2015/16 have remained on their programme.
- Learners develop a wide range of good practical, personal and employability skills, which are recognised and valued by employers.
- Learners adapt and use their new knowledge and skills well within their personal lives.
- Almost all apprentices progress into sustained employment after completing their programmes. The majority of learners completing traineeships progress to positive destinations, mainly apprenticeships.
- Trainers have a good knowledge of learners' abilities and ensure that they are suitably challenged and work to their full potential.
- Good teaching, learning and pastoral support enable learners to make good progress and successfully complete their courses on time.
- Good use of on- and off-the-job learning resources deepens and consolidates apprentices' and trainees' learning.
- Trainers use initial and diagnostic assessments well to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in their English and mathematics skills.
- Processes to manage subcontractors are effective in ensuring that they perform well.
- Managers work flexibly to meet the training needs of employers.
- Managers have high aspirations for learners which are shared by staff and by subcontractors.

### It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Too few employers are fully involved in planning learning to coordinate on- and off-the-job learning well enough for all learners.
- Trainers are not consistently using the assessment policy to help learners improve the errors in their written work.
- Managers have not yet established consistent practices to promote the development of learners' English and mathematics skills within vocational learning.
- Managers have not yet ensured that diversity themes are promoted well by all staff.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Asset Training and Consultancy (ATC) is an independent learning provider based in Bootle, Merseyside. ATC employs 23 staff including five part-time staff. Eight staff are directly involved in teaching, learning and assessment. ATC has two main sites and works with 10 subcontractors across England to provide apprenticeships, traineeships and short employability programmes funded by the Skills Funding Agency to 3,323 learners in 2014/15. Programmes are offered in nine sector subject areas, the most popular being health and social care, administration, service enterprise and preparation for life and work. The majority of learners are employed apprentices.
- The unemployment rate across Merseyside is higher than the rate for the north-west of England and the national average. The proportion of young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education or training is higher than the north-west average. Fewer young people gain grades A\* to C at GCSE including mathematics and English than the average in the north-west and the national average.

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all trainers are aware of and consistently apply the assessment policy on how to support their learners in improving the quality of their written work. Share good practice in how to provide constructive feedback on learners' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors, to ensure that all learners improve their skills in the use of English and to increase their chances of employment or career advancement. Further integrate the promotion of English and mathematics within vocational learning sessions.
- Involve more employers in the planning of learning, particularly in the coordination of on- and off-the-job learning, to enable all learners to have a cohesive and complementary learning programme.
- Ensure that diversity themes are promoted well by all staff to raise learners' awareness and understanding of equality and diversity, and the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Managers have created an open and positive culture in which their ambitions for learners are shared by assessors and trainers. Through frequent discussion with staff, managers know their learners well, understand any problems that might prevent learners from being successful and work hard to remove any obstacles to their success. Consequently, a high proportion of apprentices and trainees are successful. Subcontractors share the high expectations set by leaders at ATC.
- Managers have established strong processes for the management of subcontractors. These include careful initial reviews of subcontractors' ability to deliver training to a high standard, regular audits of systems and paperwork, and monthly reviews of performance data. Consequently, outcomes are very good for learners who study with subcontractors. In addition, ATC staff help subcontractors to improve their practice through policy updates, training events on themes such as self-assessment, and monthly networking opportunities that are used well to share good practice. Subcontractors are very positive about the support they receive from ATC.
- Managers consult staff and subcontractors as part of the self-assessment process and the result is a self-assessment report that is broadly accurate and analyses well the particular challenges faced over the preceding year. As a result, the quality improvement plan contains an appropriate range of actions that lead to clear improvements in quality.
- Staff monitor closely the performance of different groups of learners and support well those who are less likely to succeed. Staff are fully aware of the progress of learners from vulnerable groups, such as care leavers. Where learners have additional learning needs, staff quickly establish what help they require and put effective support in place.
- Managers work well with employers to establish their training needs and work flexibly to meet them. For example, they have worked with a major employer and a subcontractor to develop traineeship programmes leading to apprenticeships for warehouse operatives that include forklift truck qualifications. Apprentices and trainees are successful in securing and sustaining employment as a result of these strong partnerships, and employers speak very positively about their relationship with ATC. However, managers pay insufficient attention to regional and national priorities such as increasing the number of 16–18-year-old apprentices.
- Initial advice and guidance ensure that most learners join programmes that match their needs well. As a result, the large majority of learners and apprentices make strong progress and achieve their qualifications within planned timescales. However, in a few cases, individuals are recruited to apprenticeship programmes that do not develop their skills and understanding sufficiently. Ongoing impartial advice and guidance are very effective in ensuring that learners make appropriate choices about their future career direction.
- Managers are beginning to make better use of data to monitor the progress of learners and their destinations, and the performance of assessors and subcontractors. However, systems are not yet fully developed and managers do not always recognise inaccurate or flawed data; this occasionally leads them to a view of quality that is too positive.
- The large majority of learners and apprentices develop their English and mathematical skills and achieve functional skills qualifications. However, managers have recognised that assessors and trainers do not always do enough to integrate the development of English and mathematical skills within vocational learning sessions. They have taken a number of steps to improve this, such as helping all staff to gain functional skills qualifications at level 2, but these measures have not yet had enough impact.
- Assessors are insufficiently aware of the targets they have agreed with managers for the outcomes of their work, although they recognise the expectation that a high proportion of learners should develop rapidly their skills and understanding. Assessors have monthly performance review meetings with their managers, but these do not result in sufficiently clear action plans for improvement. Managers frequently observe teaching, learning and assessment, but do not focus sufficiently on learners' progress; the training and action plans arising from observations lack the clarity needed to drive improvements.
- Managers recognise the importance of promoting equality and diversity. They have developed appropriate policies and action plans and examine closely the performance of various groups of learners to ensure that there are no significant differences in achievement. However, managers have not yet done enough to ensure that assessors and trainers focus on the themes of equality, diversity and British values in sufficient depth to raise learners' awareness of these issues.

## ■ The governance of the provider

- The provider has developed effective informal arrangements for governance. The owner of the company meets with the managing director on a weekly basis, and an advisory group comprising the owner, two other directors and the managing director meets on a quarterly basis.
- Board members have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provider, including the challenges ATC has had to resolve over the previous 12 months. They hold senior leaders to account and provide support as necessary. For example, they have challenged the managing director over the pace of apprentice recruitment and have helped to develop strategies to increase this.
- Board members have a good understanding of the overall landscape of further education and skills training, and use this knowledge well to inform discussions about the provider's strategic direction. For example, they are helping to position the company in preparation for the introduction of the employer levy.

## ■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Staff are appropriately vetted prior to the commencement of their employment.
- Learners are helped to develop an understanding of safe working practices and workplaces are safe.
- Staff understand the nature and signs of radicalisation and extremism as a result of training they have received, and they understand how to raise concerns. However, they have yet to give sufficient help to their learners so that they develop the same level of understanding.
- E-safety guidance and training require further development.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Most learners enjoy their learning and develop a good range of personal, vocational and employability skills and knowledge. Class sizes are small and learners receive good individual coaching from trainers, ensuring that learning is specifically targeted at their identified needs. Learners make sound progress as a result of good learning support and they complete their courses within the planned time.
- Pastoral support is good and is valued particularly by learners who have personal and domestic problems which can adversely affect their learning. For example, learners with particularly high support needs, such as care leavers and ex-offenders, are especially grateful for the pastoral support they receive which enables them to stay on their programme when they might otherwise leave.
- Trainers and assessors are conscientious and enthusiastic. They ensure that learners are suitably challenged and work to their full potential. Where learners have additional learning needs, trainers quickly identify them and make appropriate adjustments. If learners need guidance between learning sessions or trainers' visits, good arrangements are made for them to contact trainers by telephone, text or email, thereby minimising any disruption to their studies.
- Trainers and assessors have good subject knowledge and are appropriately qualified and experienced. Trainers and assessors have a good understanding of commercial and industrial practices and reflect these when they plan and implement learning. Additionally, they regularly visit workplaces to tutor and assess learners, and to keep up to date with current developments and new ways of working to ensure that the employers' needs are met.
- Trainers make good use of on- and off-the-job learning resources to deepen and consolidate apprentices' and trainees' learning. Work experience makes a significant contribution to learners' employability skills, including the development of appropriate attitudes and acceptable workplace behaviour. However, not all employers are sufficiently involved in planning learning; as a result, a minority of learners do not have a tightly coordinated programme of on- and off-the-job learning, which means that learning is not always swiftly consolidated.
- Learners are appropriately assessed throughout their course. Staff usually give good oral feedback to learners but the quality of their written feedback is too variable. The best written feedback is comprehensive, analytical and informative. However, feedback from a minority of staff is insufficiently precise and poorly expressed, often with spelling and grammatical errors. Learners' spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors are not routinely identified and corrected with the result that a few errors are repeated.
- ATC makes good use of initial and diagnostic assessments in English and mathematics. Individually focused English and mathematics learning programmes are planned and implemented to enable learners to make rapid progress. Trainers and assessors do not always develop and extend learners' English and mathematical competencies in vocational sessions, and this requires improvement.

- Managers and staff regularly review learners' progress together. Records show quickly whether learners are making at least the expected progress and whether their work is of the correct standard. Good additional support is provided to learners whose progress is slowing down and causing concern.
- Learners feel safe and they adopt safe working practices. Most learners have a good awareness of how to maintain their personal safety. While learners have a basic understanding of safeguarding, too few are fully acquainted with the dangers associated with terrorism, extremism and radicalisation.
- Learners have a good awareness of the importance of ensuring that there is equitable treatment for all citizens. They fully support the provider's zero tolerance of bullying, discrimination, harassment and unfair treatment. However, equality and diversity topics are not promoted sufficiently in teaching and learning, and learners' knowledge and understanding are not being progressively developed.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good**

- Learners develop good and effective work-related personal skills as a result of their training. This includes significant gains in confidence, a benefit which is recognised by learners themselves and their employers. Apprentices are enthusiastic about being able to give confident presentations and employers are positive about how their apprentices improve their interpersonal skills as a result of ATC training.
- During learning sessions, learners behave well. Across both the traineeship and apprenticeship programmes, they learn how to work well with each other, with colleagues and with managers. Learners are enthusiastic about their learning and are determined to succeed. This ambition is reflected in good attendance and punctuality.
- ATC training successfully helps to remove difficulties faced by learners, and raise their aspirations. As a result, learners have very positive attitudes about their learning. They succeed on their courses and progress to positive destinations. Most apprentices gain employment; the majority of learners on traineeships progress to positive destinations such as apprenticeships or further training.
- Information, advice and guidance staff work very effectively with a wide range of external agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, local employers and networks of other providers to share information and identify employment and work placement opportunities. However, in a minority of cases, initial guidance about the most suitable training and level of training for a learner has not been appropriate to their prior qualifications and abilities.
- Learners feel safe. Some subcontractors, such as those providing childcare training, strongly promote messages about healthy lifestyles and well-being. For example, one subcontractor makes good use of display boards and posters to provide information about healthy eating and to help learners identify symptoms and sources of support for mental health illnesses.
- Learners have sufficient awareness of their rights and responsibilities in relation to equality. However, the integration of equality and diversity within teaching and learning requires further development.
- Tutors are generally aware of the importance of mathematics and English, and in a minority of sessions these subjects are integrated well into other subjects. However, staff are not always as rigorous as they should be when marking written work and, in a few cases, overlook errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation, limiting the development of good standards.
- Learners demonstrate respect for each other, and for their tutors and employers. On one course, a few learners worked well in a discussion about radicalisation. However, the promotion of British values and 'Prevent' training for all learners requires further development.

## **Outcomes for learners are good**

- Success rates on apprenticeships are consistently high, despite a decline in 2014/15. The proportion of learners achieving their qualifications in planned time is consistently very high. Course completion and qualification pass rates are good.
- Different groups of apprentices achieve equally well, regardless of gender, ethnicity or disability. However, the qualification achievement of the very few apprentices in information and communication technology (ICT) and in construction is low. Almost all learners who enrolled in 2015/16 have remained on their programme.

- Historically, success rates for adults following classroom-based learning programmes have been high. Success rates were particularly high in health and social care, retail and commercial enterprise, and preparation for life and work, and were close to the national rate in education and training. Retention on classroom-based learning programmes is good at all ages but qualification pass rates of learners aged 16 to 18 were low in 2013/14. Very few learners were following classroom-based learning at the time of the inspection.
- The majority of learners make good progress from their starting points. They enjoy learning and are keen to progress further. Learners significantly improve their confidence and self-esteem. Learners develop a wide range of good practical, personal and employability skills including teamworking, mutual respect and timekeeping. Learners and employers recognise the usefulness of these new skills and how they significantly improve learners' job performance and career prospects. Learners adapt and use their new knowledge and skills well within their personal lives; for example, their improved communication, time management and task prioritisation skills have improved their involvement with local community groups and scout groups.
- Almost all apprentices progress into sustained employment upon completion of their full programme, but few apprentices progress to higher-level apprenticeships. The majority of learners completing traineeships progress into positive destinations, mainly to apprenticeships. Unemployed learners gain good employability skills such as increased confidence, and improved communication skills and punctuality, to improve their chances of gaining employment.
- Most learners have sufficient understanding of equality and diversity and show good levels of mutual respect and tolerance. Most learners understand how to keep themselves safe under most circumstances; however, too few learners have a good awareness of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.

## Types of provision

### Apprenticeships

### are good

- ATC training and its subcontractors were supporting 1,356 apprentices at the time of the inspection. Almost two thirds of apprentices are aged 24 or older. Just over a half of the apprentices are on intermediate-level programmes. ATC offers a wide range of provision, with apprenticeships in nine vocational areas. The majority of apprentices study health and social care, and hairdressing and beauty. ATC delivers training to just over a quarter of apprentices, the remainder being supported by the subcontractors.
- Leaders have high expectations and have been successful in maintaining high success rates through good management of the performance of subcontractors, and closely monitoring the quality and frequency of support and assessment of apprentices. Most apprentices complete their apprenticeships in the time expected. The progress of current apprentices is good. The majority of apprentices are significantly ahead of expectations of what should be completed by this stage of their programme. Apprentices supported directly by ATC make particularly rapid progress.
- Assessors plan and manage individual programmes for apprentices that meet qualification and employer requirements well, and prepare apprentices well for sustained employment. The provision meets local skills needs, and apprentices' progression into employment is very good. A significant number of apprentices have already made progress in their career, but too few apprentices progress to higher levels of learning.
- The vast majority of apprentices develop good vocational, personal and employability skills. They learn well in the workplace, from colleagues and managers. Assessment is accurate and timely. Assessors are motivated, supportive and enthusiastic. They use their experience well in individual sessions which help apprentices to develop: for instance, using the qualification frameworks to help apprentices structure their own research into the underpinning knowledge required. However, staff do not keep good records of this support.
- Managers and staff of ATC support their own apprentices well. Assessors offer good encouragement and apprentices are able to contact them at any time if obstacles arise. Assessors and managers review progress at monthly meetings and initiate additional support via extra contact time with assessors when necessary. However, assessors do not always identify the underlying reasons why a learner may need support. Technology is used to promote progress effectively. For example, apprentices and assessors use an online managed learning environment, through which learners may send their assignments and evidence of achievement, and receive feedback from staff; this makes assessment quicker and more efficient. Assessors use voice recorders effectively in reviews and apprentices make good use of internet resources for independent research.

- Apprentices feel safe and have good awareness of how to maintain their personal safety, for example when lifting residents in care homes. Staff discuss briefly, in apprentices' progress reviews, issues of health and safety, safeguarding, and equality and diversity to emphasise the importance of these matters. However, the discussions do not deepen apprentices' understanding sufficiently well.
- A small minority of apprentices are enrolled on programmes that do not sufficiently recognise their existing skills and knowledge. These apprentices are not challenged to develop sufficient new skills and knowledge. Trainers do not maintain accurate records of guided learning hours undertaken by apprentices. Reviews and learning plans are often focused on unit and assignment completion rather than growth in skills and knowledge, and do not reflect the more helpful spoken feedback provided. ATC has recently started to assess apprentices' vocational skills at the start of their programme.
- Almost all apprentices who have not already done so achieve the required level of English, mathematics and ICT skills to meet the apprenticeship qualification requirements. A few intermediate apprentices volunteer to take Level 2 English and mathematics. Assessors provide insufficient support for developing higher skills through apprentices' written work in their portfolios. Assessors' written records and feedback to learners, in a minority of cases, contain poor spelling and grammar, and do not set a good example to learners.

## Traineeships

## are good

- ATC currently has 86 trainees on its traineeship programme. Training is provided for both 16–18-year-olds and adult learners. Traineeships are provided in a variety of occupations with the majority in warehousing, transport, childcare and sport.
- Managers have high expectations of their learners. They plan individualised traineeships that build on learners' prior attainment and prepare them well for future training and employment. Managers make good use of links with employers to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality and relevant work experience. Employers value the contribution that learners make during their work placements.
- Outcomes for learners are good. The majority of learners progress to an apprenticeship, employment with training or further training. Attendance rates at both classroom-based activities and work experience are high.
- Learners make significant progress in developing practical skills; they grow in confidence, and achieve qualifications required for employment. For example, learners preparing to work in warehouses quickly develop confidence and competence in driving forklift trucks and pass the certificates required by the industry to drive both counterbalance and reach trucks. Learners in construction develop good skills in papering walls and plastering.
- Trainers are highly effective in coaching learners to develop skills. They make good use of their commercial experience to provide an industrial focus and relevance to the learning. Trainers in construction workshops make good use of a buddying system, through which learners support each other, and this results in effective peer learning.
- Assessment of learning is good. Trainers make good use of questioning to check and reinforce learners' understanding. Training sessions often conclude with a clear recap of learners' understanding of the skills and knowledge acquired.
- Trainers provide very good support for learners. Learners acquire the skills needed to be successful at work; they develop a good level of respect for their peers and staff, and work together effectively. Learners who have recently been released from custodial sentences are supported particularly well to gain greater self-confidence. Trainers place a significant emphasis on the need to be punctual; subsequently, the few learners who are late to sessions when they start their programme soon improve their attitude and arrive punctually.
- Trainers provide impartial careers guidance and good arrangements to help learners make informed choices about their future work and study options. Trainers are skilful in helping learners develop curriculum vitae and preparing them for job interviews.
- Trainers provide good support for the development of mathematical skills. They are adept in making good use of naturally occurring opportunities to integrate the development of mathematical skills within practical training. For example, forklift operators are encouraged to calculate weight balances of loads. Learners developing plastering skills are required to use mental arithmetic to calculate areas and estimate resources required, such as the number of plasterboards required for a wall. Learners report that they grow in confidence in written English but trainers do not always correct learners' errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.

- Trainers instil in learners a strong focus on safe working practices. Learners demonstrate a good awareness of safety and report feeling safe in the classroom and at work. Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding and know whom to contact should they have any concerns. Too few learners have been made aware of the dangers of radicalisation.



## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	3,323
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Ruth Smith
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.assettraining.co.uk">www.assettraining.co.uk</a>

## Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	597	N/A	36	N/A	47	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	132	653	42	463	N/A	66		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	151		52		203			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ CTS Limited</li> <li>■ Aigburth Training Opportunities</li> <li>■ Lorraine Michaels (Crosby Training)</li> <li>■ Mooreskills</li> <li>■ Elev8 Training</li> <li>■ Horseshoe Training</li> <li>■ Riverside LEC</li> <li>■ Style Training Ltd</li> <li>■ FLT Training (Liverpool) Ltd</li> <li>■ Joint Learning Partnership</li> </ul>							

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Bob Busby, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Russell Henry	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
David Longworth	Ofsted Inspector
Priscilla McGuire	Ofsted Inspector
Roger Pilgrim	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the head of operations, delivery and training, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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