

# Quality and Standards in Training in Wales

## Inspection Report Acorn Recruitment September 2001



Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi Dros Addysg  
A Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
For Education and Training in Wales



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- ▲ pupil referral units;
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- ▲ voluntary youth agencies;
- ▲ LEAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ assembly-funded training;
- ▲ the careers service;
- ▲ the education, careers and training elements of New Deal.

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- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others;
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**This report is one of a series on the quality and standards of training in Wales.**

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## Summary: Acorn recruitment

Located in the centre of Newport, Acorn Recruitment provides training in business administration, which consists only of call centre training; retailing and customer services, which consists of training in warehousing; and manufacturing. The quality of training in business administration is good with outstanding features. The high quality workplaces and the commitment and contribution of employers to the planning of training are outstanding. The quality of training in manufacturing and in retailing and customer service, is good with no important shortcomings. The planning and management of training, resources for training and the management of quality are good with no important shortcomings. Equality of opportunity and support for trainees have good features which outweigh shortcomings.

### Grade profile

<b>Occupational area</b>	<b>Grade awarded</b>
Business administration	1
Manufacturing	2
Retailing and customer service	2

<b>Generic aspects</b>	<b>Grade awarded</b>
Planning and managing training	2
Equality of opportunity and support for trainees	3
Resources for training	2
Management of quality	2

## Introduction

- 1 Founded in 1992, Acorn Recruitment is the largest, independent recruitment and training specialist in Wales. From its eight branches throughout south Wales, it aims to service the sourcing, recruiting and training needs of business through the supply of temporary, contract and permanent staff. Acorn Training Services was established in 1997. It is a separate cost centre with its central office in Newport. Its prime objective is to supply quality training programmes and consultancy services to meet the needs of the business community. Its operations are designed to complement those of the recruitment business and to offer employers a complete recruitment and training package. Acorn Training offers a comprehensive portfolio of programmes which includes health and safety training, job ready training, training needs analysis, up-skilling, effective leadership and teambuilding, total quality management and team leader awards. A senior training manager has overall responsibility for the operation of the training function, assisted by two training co-ordinators, one for manufacturing and warehousing, and one for call centre training. Acorn has two dedicated training centres. The Cardiff centre serves the manufacturing industry and the Newport centre serves the call centre industry. Training is offered in three occupational areas; business administration; manufacturing; and retailing and customer service.
- 2 At the time of the inspection, there were 157 trainees on Assembly-funded training programmes. All were employed, or contracted to Acorn. The majority of previous trainees were on other youth programmes.

Modern apprentices	National trainees	Other youth training	WBLA	Skill build	New Deal
0	157	0	0	0	0

- 3 Inspectors visited the company in September 2001 and met with managers, trainers, assessors and workplace supervisors. Trainees were interviewed and observed during training and assessment at the workplace. Inspectors scrutinised documentation made available by the company, including policies and operating procedures relating to training and induction, training plans, portfolios and data relating to training outcomes.

**Occupational area: Manufacturing**

- 4 At the time of the inspection, there were 84 national trainees in manufacturing, all working towards an NVQ in Performing Manufacturing Operations at Level 2, and the two wider key skills of improving own learning and working with others. Most trainees are employed by a large electronics manufacturing company in Cardiff.
- 5 Training is delivered in-house at the company's premises, with assessment and verification delivered by the training provider's own staff, all trained to D32, D33 and D34 standards. Most trainees make good progress towards the completion of units towards their NVQs and the two key skills identified in their individual training plans. Trainees have few opportunities to gain additional qualifications relevant to their work roles, such as manual handling, or health and safety, which would extend and underpin their vocational competence.

	Modern Apprenticeship	National traineeship	Other training	WBLA
Number of Trainees	0	84	0	0

**Element 1:  
The quality of training, learning and assessment**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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**The quality of training and learning**

- 6 Training is well planned to meet the needs of the employers, trainees and the requirements of the awarding body. All trainees receive a detailed and thorough induction from their employers which includes the distribution of handouts or induction packs giving relevant company and training information. Trainees also receive an induction into the NVQ programme at the initial meeting with their assessor. This session is used to prepare an individual training plan. Trainees develop appropriate occupational competence through departmental on-the-job experience where assessment also takes place. However, current trainees have received little, or no training in key skills. Trainees and assessors only map portfolio assessment evidence for the wider key skills. Assessors have developed a useful training and assessment pack to meet the new key skills requirements of the national trainee framework. These are slowly being introduced into training programmes. Their training and assessment is contributing well to their personal confidence and self-esteem.

- 7 Employers and workplace supervisors are involved in the development of training plans and reviews, but their knowledge of the NVQ structure and assessment requirements is sometimes limited. Relationships between trainees, assessors and employers are excellent.

### **The quality of assessment**

- 8 Training provider assessors appropriately undertake all assessment at the employer's premises. Individual training plans are prepared to meet the assessment needs of the trainee. The assessment and verification process is well planned to meet the requirements of the awarding bodies. Assessment planning takes into consideration any constraints that may be encountered by trainees; for example, trainees are required to move to different sections due to production demands or to change shift patterns. Judgements on trainee assessments are accurately recorded with monitoring, support and guidance supported by regular visits of the internal verifier. The majority of all assessments take place at the workstation. This restricts opportunities for detailed questioning to check underpinning knowledge and understanding.
- 9 Trainees take good care of their portfolios along with assessment records of their achievement, though portfolios contain a limited range of assessment evidence. Training co-ordinators effectively track individual and overall progress of their trainees in the main office. Wall charts provide detailed records on each trainee's progress towards unit and NVQ completion. Assessors provide good one-to-one support to trainees with learning difficulties. This helps trainees to develop self-esteem and confidence.
- 10 Assessors give good verbal and written feedback, enabling trainees to identify areas where improvements can be made. Reviews of trainee progress are regular and detailed, though trainees do not always contribute enough to the review process.

### **Element 2: Standards achieved by trainees**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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### **Achievement**

- 11 Trainees develop good occupational knowledge and understanding, and vocational skills. They develop vocational competence and confidence during the course of their training and work productively. They work well with colleagues in the workplace and are keen to progress to other NVQ programmes. Attendance and punctuality are very good and are continually monitored by both employer and training provider.

## Attainment

Leavers / Completers April 00 – September 01									
	New starters during this period	Total leavers this period	Leavers gaining full NVQ award	Leavers gaining full NVQ and 3 or more key skills*	Leavers gaining part NVQ of 6 or more units	Leavers gaining part NVQ of between 1 and 5 units	Leavers without gaining a qualification		
							Related employment	Other employment	Unemployed
MA									
NT									
OYT	417	437	53	216	0	0	7	17	144
WBLA	18	17	0	0	0	8	0	0	9

Key: MA - Modern Apprentices, NT - National Trainees, OYT - Other Youth Training and WBLA - Work-Based Learning for Adults

- Trainees were not required to complete three key skills as part of their frameworks.

- 12 Attainment rates are generally good. For the reporting period from April 2000 to September 2001, trainees were not required to complete key skills qualifications as part of their OYT frameworks for manufacturing. Forty nine percent of trainees completed their NVQ at Level 2 and two key skills of improving own learning and working with others. An additional twelve percent completed the NVQ Level 2 without the key skills.

### Main findings

<b>Overall grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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- 13 Overall, standards of training in manufacturing are good with no important shortcomings. Trainees develop good occupational knowledge, understanding and skills appropriate to their level of training. Most trainees gain an NVQ and two key skills, improving own learning and working with others. The development of training materials for the delivery of key skills 2000 is now at an advanced stage, and the materials are being gradually introduced to current trainees. Acorn staff, employers and trainees work well as a team to ensure that trainees' and employers' needs are met.

### Good features:

- (i) excellent relationships between staff, trainees and employers;
- (ii) one-to-one support for trainees through regular contact with training staff; and
- (iii) vocational competence and confidence gained by trainees through on-the-job training.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) improve assessment practice by increasing the range of assessment evidence;
- (ii) raise employer awareness of the NVQ structure and the assessment process to enable them to maximise the use of optional units in departmental requirements; and
- (iii) develop opportunities within companies to improve the locations available for off-the-job training and reviews.

**Occupational area: Business administration**

14 At the time of inspection there were 53 trainees working towards qualifications in business administration. All were national trainees working towards telecommunications and call centre handling NVQs at Level 2. They are employed in high-profile companies offering call-centre services to the financial and service industries.

	Modern apprenticeship	National traineeship	Other training	WBLA
Number of trainees	0	53	0	0

**Element 1:**

**The quality of training, learning and assessment:**

Grade	1
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**The quality of training and learning**

15 Training is very well planned to meet the needs of both trainees and employers. The support, commitment and involvement of employers in the planning and managing of training is outstanding. Trainees have a full understanding of the requirements of the NVQ programme and expected completion time. They are fully aware of their responsibilities throughout their learning programmes and have full ownership of their award. Employers and Acorn training staff recognise this through the awarding of a certificate of excellence on achieving two units and through awards for “team member of the week.” These contribute to the development of high levels of confidence and good communication skills within teams. Relationships between assessors, trainees and employers are excellent.

- 16 Occupational training is effectively carried out on-the-job through coaching by the employer. The integration of on-the-job and off-the-job training is an outstanding feature. Assessors are based at the employers' premises and ensure that all training is carefully matched to meet employers' and trainees' needs. Trainees have very good opportunities for off-the-job training to assist development of their key skills and to generate evidence for their portfolios.
- 17 A small number of trainees have completed the old key skills awards. Trainers have spent a lot of time developing detailed workbooks and planning workshops to deliver the new key skills requirements. Trainers and trainees are enthusiastic about the new key skills and the workshop approach is starting to raise awareness of the key skills requirements, and how evidence for assessment can be provided.
- 18 All trainees complete a training needs analysis through a detailed self-assessment on starting their qualification, which is then revisited at 13 weeks, and on completion. They are assessed for basic skills and occupational suitability during recruitment. Learning difficulties and support requirements are effectively identified at that stage, though few trainees have been identified as requiring additional help.
- 19 Well-planned induction sessions, provided by both employers and Acorn staff, include detailed attention to health and safety and equal opportunities. They provide trainees with detailed and accurate information and encouragement to complete their NVQ Level 2, and how to progress to further units or the award at Level 3. Portfolios are well organised and contain a wide variety of evidence from their work activities. This wide range of evidence is generated by observation of assessment; assessors listening to live conversations (using the "buddy system", where the assessor has headphones attached to the trainees' headset); data logging; product evidence using scripts from the call centre campaigns; written answers; and witness testimonies. Trainees are made aware of their responsibilities for gathering product evidence for agreed units. These are then reviewed and new targets recorded.

### **The quality of assessment**

- 20 Acorn assessors are based permanently at the employers' premises. They are available to see their trainees almost on a daily basis, and have a formal session with each trainee on a fortnightly basis. They devise detailed, individual training plans with detailed input from employers and with the agreement of the trainees. Trainees file their individual training plans and reviews in their portfolios, which are kept with them at their workstation.
- 21 Assessors and trainees meet regularly to complete progress reviews, outlining achievements since the last review. Team leaders give regular and detailed feedback to assessors regarding the trainees' progress, and skills developed and practised over the review period. Realistic and achievable targets are set for completion of units and these are agreed with the trainee during the review. Team leaders are aware of the assessment requirements though few actually assess in the workplace.

- 22 Assessment plans and results are well documented and recorded, and assessors complete detailed observation sheets. They provide detailed and constructive feedback, both oral and written, to trainees at the end of each assessment. Assessors complete written returns on a weekly basis to keep internal verifiers and the call centre co-ordinator up-to-date regarding trainees' achievements during that period. Internal verifier systems are well documented and effectively used to track trainees from registration to completion.

**Good practice**

Acorn assessors are based at the employers' premises. They work very close with employers and workplace supervisors on a daily basis. They are an important part of the call centre team and contribute greatly to the trainees' overall workplace experience. Assessors are on hand to provide additional training and to respond quickly to trainees' assessment needs. This is often at short notice, such as is often required during computer 'down time' in the call centre. Assessors and trainees make good use of this time to review progress and discuss assessment evidence. This enables trainees to complete the NVQ qualification quickly.

**Element 2:  
Standards achieved by trainees:**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>
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**Achievement**

- 23 Trainees gain valuable occupational skills and experience through on-the-job training and attain high standards relevant to their work in various aspects of call centre operations. They are confident and competent in their job roles and take a full and active part in planning and managing their learning. They complete their NVQs at a rapid pace and quickly move into further training. Many become team leaders and take on additional responsibilities within their teams.
- 24 Standards achieved meet the expectations of the employers and sometimes exceed the requirement of the awarding bodies. Trainees are fully involved in their training and reviews, and take an active part in discussing progress and agreeing targets with their assessor.

## Attainment

LEAVERS/COMPLETERS April 2000 – September 2001									
	New starts during this period	Total leavers this period	Leavers gaining full NVQ award	Leavers gaining full NVQ and 3 or more key skills	Leavers gaining part NVQ of 6 or more units	Leavers gaining part NVQ of between 1 and 5 units	Leavers without gaining a qualification		
							Related employment	Other employment	Unemployed
MA									
NT	0	104	9	53	0	0	0	0	*42
OYT									
WBLA									

- Key: MA - Modern Apprentices, NT - National Trainees, OYT - Other Youth Training and WBLA - Work-Based Learning for Adults Leavers due to the temporary nature of the contract.

25 Fifty percent of trainees leaving the programme completed their training and the full national trainee framework of the NVQ at Level 2 and three key skills. Ten percent of trainees completed their NVQ but did not attain key skills. Almost all of the trainees completing their training gain the full NVQ and at least three key skills. Forty percent of leavers left without gaining a qualification. Most of the early leavers left employment in the call centres due to the temporary nature of their contracts and the high turnover of staff. Early leavers receive no recognition for any completed units, though most leave within the first few weeks of training.

### Good practice

Assessors and employers work very closely together as a team to plan and manage all aspects of training. One employer, as an incentive, offers trainees permanent employment on completion of the NVQ at Level 2. Another employer sees the NVQ as a first step in the process of mapping a progressive career within the finance industry, with trainees quickly moving into careers in sales, collections, customer service, litigation or underwriting. Every employee in this company is entitled to 15 days training per year.

### Main findings

<b>Overall grade</b>	<b>1</b>
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26 The quality of training in business administration is good, with outstanding features. Trainees work in high quality workplaces. Employers are very supportive and are fully involved in all aspects of planning training. Trainee progress is reviewed regularly. Trainees are well supported by their assessors who are based on the employers' premises.

**Good and outstanding features:**

- (i) high quality workplaces;
- (ii) standard of training, guidance and assessment;
- (iii) one-to-one support given by assessors;
- (iv) employer support, commitment and involvement in all aspects of training;
- (v) training needs analysis carried out at induction and regularly reviewed; and
- (vi) high level of confidence and support provided by teams and team leaders.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) encourage more employers to take part in workplace assessment; and
- (ii) continue with key skills developments to ensure that all trainees have opportunities to attend workshops and develop their key skills.

**Occupational area: Retailing and customer service**

- 27 At the time of the inspection there were 17 trainees working towards the national traineeship in distribution and warehousing. The current framework requires trainees to gain an NVQ at Level 2 and at least two additional units from a list of fifteen given by the Distributive National Training Organisation.
- 28 Trainees are employed in manufacturing, distribution or food processing environments. They are located within a twenty-mile radius of Newport and are trained in-house by their employers.

	Modern apprenticeship	National traineeship	Other training	WBLA
Number of trainees	0	17	0	0

**Element 1:**  
**The quality of training, learning and assessment**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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**The quality of training and learning**

- 29 Training is effectively planned to meet the needs of trainees, employers and awarding bodies. The assessor frequently works flexibly to avoid a clash between production and assessment demands. Trainees demonstrate personal confidence and self-esteem. They believe their confidence grows as they develop work-related skills. NVQ assessments encourage them to value the level of skills they acquire.
- 30 Workplaces provide suitable learning and assessment opportunities that meet the needs of the NVQ, and trainees develop a wide range of occupational skills. Trainees have regular opportunities to experience a variety of jobs and this maintains interest in their work. One trainee recently exchanged jobs with his supervisor for the day and experienced the demands and responsibilities of line management.
- 31 Employers have copies of trainees' training programmes but make little use of them, as they mostly do not understand the requirements of the national trainee framework for retailing and customer services, the NVQ or the key skills. As a result, they tend to leave management of assessment to the training provider's assessor. In the meantime, opportunities to assess key skills in the workplace are missed.
- 32 Trainees do not receive off-the-job training. They develop underpinning knowledge by researching their organisation's policies, procedures and other literature in order to provide answers to written questions. Where there are gaps, appropriate case studies are used. In addition, the assessor gives one-to-one shop-floor training in the two NVQ units that cover health and safety and security. One organisation provides a number of in-house, off-the-job training courses for all employees and the trainees benefit from attending these courses.
- 33 Portfolios are well presented, attractive and well structured. They are being increasingly customised to include organisation-specific information. Some of the information in the trainees' portfolio is misleading. For example, it suggests that key skills are optional, it gives no information on how the national traineeship framework may be achieved, and the key skills mentioned in the portfolio are different from those in the framework.

### **The quality of assessment**

- 34 Assessors complete initial assessments, but as all trainees are employed and the job role has already been decided, the training option must be the one that matches the trainee's occupation. As a result, all the training programmes are well matched with the work roles of the trainees.
- 35 Relationships between trainees and the assessor are strong and positive. The assessor makes regular weekly visits to the workplace and uses a good range of assessment methods. These take full advantage of performance evidence occurring naturally in the workplace. Assessment of NVQs is reliable, accurate and fair and each is fully recorded during the assessment process. These are kept in the trainee's file. Verbal feedback is given immediately after each assessment and accurate, detailed feedback records are kept in the file. However, trainees do not have a summary sheet giving an overview of progress to date.
- 36 The assessment of key skills is not fully developed. Assessment of working with others and improving own learning is integrated within the assessment of the NVQ but the remaining key skills are not being assessed. The provider is currently developing resources to address this issue.

### **Element 2: Standards achieved by trainees**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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### **Achievement**

- 37 Trainees often develop IT, communications and number skills on-the-job. A few trainees use computerised equipment for picking or labelling and use written and verbal communications skills to solve shop floor problems and to relate to the rest of the work team. They also develop appropriate levels of counting and basic calculation skills, as these are frequently an essential part of the job requirements. Timekeeping and attendance are good. One trainee is in the top band for bonuses based on timekeeping and attendance. Another has a one hundred percent attendance record and arrives at work half an hour early every day.

## Attainment

Leavers / completers April 2000 to September 2001									
	New starts during this period	Total leavers this period	Leavers gaining full NVQ award	Leavers gaining full NVQ and 3 or more key skills	Leavers gaining part NVQ of 6 or more units	Leavers gaining part NVQ of between 1 and 5 units	Leavers without gaining a qualification		
							Related employment	Other employment	Unemployed
MA									
NT									
OYT	32	24	20	0	0	0	1	0	3
WBLA									

Key: MA - Modern Apprentices, NT - National Trainees, OYT - Other Youth Training and WBLA - Work-Based Training for Adults

- 38 Attainment for the period 1/4/2000 to 1/9/2001 is good. Eighty four percent of trainees completing their programme attained the NVQ award at Level 2. They were not required to complete key skills as part of their OYT frameworks. Thirty three percent of trainees completed the wider key skills of working with others and improving own learning.

## Main findings

<b>Overall grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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- 39 The quality of training in retailing and customer service is good, with no important shortcomings. Trainees work in appropriate workplaces and employers are supportive and involved in all aspects of planning training. Trainees are well supported by their assessors who visit them regularly. Attainment rates are good.
- (i) relationships between assessors and trainees;
  - (ii) thorough and effective review process;
  - (iii) very frequent visits from assessor;
  - (iv) range of assessment methods used and regular feedback given after each assessment; and
  - (v) the number of trainees gaining NVQ awards.

## Generic aspects

### Element 3: Planning and managing training

Grade	2
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- 40 Overall, planning and management of training are good. Acorn Recruitment is part of a wider group of companies which offer a complete recruitment and training service to business and industry. The training division is a separate cost centre from the recruitment division, but they work closely together to provide quality training to employees recruited by Acorn, and to other trainees. The organisation has a clear mission. It has grown rapidly over the past four years, and it has ambitious plans to expand its training, product range, outsourcing, e-learning, and consultancy work. A very detailed and professional business plan clearly indicates their future direction and the necessary planning to achieve the ambitious targets within the plan. The organisation is committed to training, and has the right values and attitudes to deliver training of the highest quality.
- 41 Each of the training teams responsible for call centre training, and manufacturing and warehousing, has its own business plan with well-defined targets for training. These plans specify individual assessor targets, which in turn, inform the team and organisation business plans.
- 42 The quality of workplaces is mainly good, and sometimes excellent. Co-operation between assessors, employers and trainees is very good. Employers are fully involved in the planning of training programmes and are very supportive of the efforts made by Acorn staff. All parties work closely together to match training and organisation needs to NVQ requirements. Employers are well aware of their roles and responsibilities, and participate willingly in most aspects of training.
- 43 In the case of large employers, assessors are based in the employer's premises and they work closely with team leaders to plan and complete assessment and training in line with work schedules and shift patterns. On-the-job and off-the-job training are effectively integrated. All trainees are employed and all assessment and training takes place at the employer's premises. However, few employers have their own workplace assessors.
- 44 The organisation has developed good partnership arrangements with other training providers and colleges to complement the training that they provide. Basic skills support, fork lift training, job focus or job tasters are arranged through these partnerships. Staff also represent training organisations on the National Training Federation for Wales.
- 45 Training programmes have clear objectives, their content and outcomes are carefully discussed with all parties to ensure that trainee, and employer needs are met. Recruitment staff at the parent organisation complete initial assessments.

Trainees identified as requiring additional support are referred to a training partner. Reviews are detailed and thorough. They are completed regularly and are well documented. However, in a small number of cases, employers or workplace supervisors are not directly involved in the reviews. Employers and trainees rarely prepare beforehand for the reviews.

- 46 Planning for the delivery of key skills 2000 has been slow. Plans are now in place to significantly increase opportunities for key skills development and assessment through a series of workshops. Key skills booklets have been produced in-house for call centre trainees and are being developed for manufacturing trainees. An appropriate emphasis has been placed on staff training for key skills.
- 47 Progression opportunities are being developed. Call centre trainees can progress to NVQ Level 3 or on to other qualifications in information technology, management or administration.
- 48 Few opportunities exist for bilingual training or assessment. The provider has identified the need to investigate the demand for this provision in its self-assessment. However, no action has been taken to date.

**Good features:**

- (i) detailed and professional business plans clearly indicating future direction and the necessary planning to achieve the targets within the plan;
- (ii) involvement of employers in all aspects of planning for training;
- (iii) partnerships with other providers and colleges;
- (iv) quality workplaces; and
- (v) the use of targets and performance indicators.

**Element 4:  
Equality of opportunity and support for trainees**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>3</b>
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- 49 The organisation has written and implemented an equal opportunities policy and trainees are made aware of it at induction. A copy of this policy is placed in the trainees' files. The same policy applies to the provider's own employees who are also introduced to the policy at their inductions. The policy is not written specifically for trainees and is therefore not generally well understood. Equality of opportunity is not routinely managed, monitored or reviewed within all aspects of the provision. Monitoring consists mainly of gathering data on trainee numbers and analysing them for gender and ethnicity. There are no actions to address any issues revealed by the analysis.
- 50 The statistical report for year ending 31/3/01 shows that 96% of trainees were white British, and the remaining 4% were from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. The gender breakdown was 38% female and 62% male. It is not made clear if these figures reflect the local population or if any significant conclusions arise from these findings. Trainees with disabilities and whose first language is Welsh are not included in these statistics.
- 51 Assessors give trainees a written complaints procedure outlining the procedures for trainees who are unhappy with their assessment results. Trainees receive comprehensive information prior to entry and on induction. The induction process and the effective establishment of good relationship with trainers ensure that trainees settle in quickly to their training programmes.
- 52 Assessors see their trainees regularly to carry out reviews and assessment, and provide a high level of one-to-one support. In call centre training, and in manufacturing, assessors are based in the workplace. They offer a high level of first line support and work closely with team leaders to provide additional help.
- 53 The organisation does not provide a personal counselling service. Assessors appropriately refer problems to external agencies or trainees may approach their employers' Human Resources departments. The organisation has effective systems in place to provide additional support for trainees with basic skills needs but not all assessors are aware of the procedures for referral.

**Good features:**

- (i) equality of opportunity is integral to the training function and is promoted by assessors at every trainee induction;
- (ii) induction is used to establish good relationships and ensure trainees settle in quickly;
- (iii) trainers give regular and effective support on a one to one basis; and
- (iv) trainees keep a copy of the assessments complaints procedure in their file.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) review the equal opportunities policy and evaluate its suitability for trainees;
- (ii) continue to evaluate and take appropriate action on findings from monitoring of equal opportunities; and
- (iii) ensure all assessors are aware of the support systems available for trainees with special needs.

**Element 5:  
Resources for training**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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54 The quality of resources for training is good, and sometimes very good. Staff are well qualified and keep up-to-date through regular team meetings and staff development events.

**Staffing**

55 Staff are well qualified and experienced in their occupational areas. All assessors have the relevant training and development units, apart from one member of staff, who has completed the portfolio and is awaiting certification. Several staff also have the internal verifier award and one member of staff is qualified to facilitate learning through instruction and demonstration. Acorn staff have also attended key-skills workshops, one member of staff has completed the key-skills assessors award and other members are currently preparing portfolios. All training staff have also gained group training certificates.

56 A strong emphasis is placed on staff development. All staff have a minimum entitlement of 10 days staff development per year. Training needs are identified at an annual appraisal, which leads to the development of individual training plans. These include setting challenging performance targets for training staff. Individuals are associated to professional organisations i.e. IVA. All staff have individual job descriptions which clearly indicate their roles and responsibilities. Assessors work closely as a team and are well managed by their training co-ordinators. Regular departmental and team meetings ensure that staff keep up-to-date with changes in policies and procedures.

### **Accommodation**

57 Accommodation at the training centre provides a pleasant and enriching environment for staff and trainees. Wheelchair users do not have easy access to this facility. At Newport, Acorn has established a 'live' call centre which enables trainees to receive training in an on-site, computerised simulation package or have their own company's bespoke package downloaded, allowing staff to train them to their employer's requirements. Employers' accommodation is mostly good, and sometimes very good.

### **Resources**

58 Trainers have access to a variety of training materials to support training and learning, such as videos, workbooks and open-learning packages. Trainees do not have access to an up-to-date catalogue of these resources. Resources are updated as required, by trainers making requests to the occupational co-ordinator.

59 Trainees and trainers make little use of the Internet or CD-ROM based material to support training and learning, even though many trainees work with computers on a daily basis.

60 Electrical equipment is checked on an annual basis. Health and safety checks are carried out on all workplaces as well as regular risk assessments.

### **Good features:**

- (i) well qualified and experienced staff;
- (ii) effective teamwork with clear understanding of roles and responsibilities;
- (iii) annual staff appraisals and quarterly reviews; and
- (iv) quality of accommodation for training, particularly for call centre training.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) Make greater use of the Internet and CD-ROMs to support training and learning.

**Element 6:  
Management of quality**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>2</b>
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- 61 The management of quality has good features with no important shortcomings.
- 62 The organisation places a strong emphasis on quality and continuous improvement. Staff are committed to providing high quality training. Systems for the management of quality have been revised recently and the organisation has well-defined and well-documented procedures for the management of the quality of training. Staff know their responsibilities and are actively involved with the management and review of the quality of training. Individual tracking of trainee progress is good, with assessors keeping detailed and thorough records of progress. Training co-ordinators regularly review these records and produce wall charts giving a useful overview of the progress of all trainees within their occupational areas. This system allows early identification of slow progress towards unit and NVQ completion, and appropriate action to be taken at an early stage.
- 63 The organisation sets challenging targets for each team and for individual assessors within these teams. Targets are closely linked to the business plan and are mainly used for financial planning, though an increasing use is being made of these targets and key performance indicators in quality management. Training outcomes and other statistical elements are collected and monitored for the National Council for Education and Training in Wales auditing purposes. Not enough use is made of year-on-year analyses of this data to identify trends over time or to inform managers and co-ordinators of emerging issues.
- 64 Questionnaires are used to monitor trainee perceptions after one month of training, and at the end of training. These are analysed for each occupational area and for each employer. Trainees also complete evaluation forms at the end of each formal training session. Questionnaires have been developed for workplace supervisors and for employers. These are new to the quality system and they have not yet impacted on the quality of training provided.

- 65 Internal verification systems are robust, and regular team meetings and assessor forum meetings address developmental and quality issues. Team meetings mainly address operational issues but are increasingly addressing issues of quality. Team meetings are minuted but do not always contain action points or confirmation that actions have been taken or completed. Internal verifiers and team co-ordinators undertake assessment of their teams as they work with their trainees in the workplace. This is a useful way of identifying strengths and weaknesses and of identifying developmental needs. This process has not been used to monitor the quality of all aspects of training and does not involve any peer observation.
- 66 The organisation produced a self-assessment report based on the Estyn framework. The identified strengths and weaknesses are broadly in line with those identified by the external inspection team. All staff were involved in the self-assessment process and contributed to the preparation of the final report. Quality development plans are detailed and address the strengths and weaknesses identified in the self-assessment report. They contain realistic targets for completion and identify resource requirements.
- 67 Success indicators do not contain enough measurable targets by which their success or otherwise, can be measured.

**Good features:**

- (i) well-established and documented procedures for managing the quality of training and the commitment of all staff to quality improvement;
- (ii) surveys and questionnaires to gather trainee, work-based supervisor and employer perceptions;
- (iii) use made of targets and key performance indicators for teams and assessors; and
- (iv) close match between self assessment and the findings of the external assessment team.

**Recommendations:**

- (i) continue to develop, use and analyse questionnaires to gather employer and work-based supervisor perception of training;
- (ii) make better use of data on outcomes to identify trends and to provide a sounder basis for target setting aimed at quality improvement; and
- (iii) continue to develop and formalise the methods used by internal verifiers and team co-ordinators to observe and evaluate all aspects of training.

## **Annex: Training provider's response to the report**

Acorn Recruitment & Training Services would like to take this opportunity to thank the Estyn Inspectors for their constructive, professional and positive approach throughout the inspection.

The staff are pleased with the outcome of the inspection, and feel that the grades achieved reflect the dedication of the training department, our clients and the learner to ensure a quality training programme for the benefit of all.

The findings of the Inspection confirm that Acorn is delivering training to high standards. We welcome the overall findings as a means of endorsing our commitment to continuous improvement.

Our main objective is to deliver training that meets the needs of our customers and learners, whilst maintaining standards required by ELWa, Award bodies and Lead bodies.

The report confirms that we have already recognised our shortcomings, and the team at Acorn are committed to addressing them to ensure that we continue to supply Quality Training Programmes and associated services that meet the needs of both the individual and business community.