

INSPECTION REPORT

ISIS Training Services Limited

23 May 2001



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and in New Deal options. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based training within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based training for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- the University for Industry's *learnirect* provision
- adult and community learning
- training given by the Employment Service under the New Deals.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Inadequate provision

A provider's provision will normally be deemed to be less than adequate where

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

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. The overall judgement as to whether the provision is adequate or inadequate is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

ISIS Training Services Limited is a private training organisation based in Witney, Oxfordshire. It provides training for a group of engineering companies. The company offers advanced modern apprenticeships and other work-based training programmes for young people.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Although work-based training for young people is satisfactory, the leadership and management of ISIS Training Services Limited are unsatisfactory.

Work-based learning for young people

Currently, there are 53 advanced modern apprentices and 21 young people on other work-based training programmes. All the trainees are employed by local engineering companies. Satisfactory proportions of the advanced modern apprentices remain in training and achieve their qualifications. However, these proportions are low for young people on other work-based training programmes. All the trainees benefit from good pastoral support and frequent, well-planned reviews of their progress. Many of the young people on other work-based learning programmes, who are working towards NVQs, have opportunities to gain additional qualifications. ISIS Training Services Limited does not provide workplace supervisors with enough information to plan and manage training in the workplace effectively. Although trainees are developing their key skills throughout their training, they do not start to gather evidence of this until they are near the end of their programmes.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of ISIS Training Services Limited are unsatisfactory. Well-qualified staff carry out frequent reviews of trainees' progress. The company has taken steps to increase the number of trainees recruited from under-represented groups and has introduced effective training in equality of opportunity. However, it fails to ensure that employers and subcontractors have appropriate policies on equal opportunities. Quality assurance arrangements are insufficiently thorough. Some procedures are not followed and there are no written arrangements for monitoring subcontractors' performance. The company seeks trainees' views on the quality of learning programmes and has made improvements to its training as a result. However, it does not seek employers and subcontractors' views. Inspectors agreed with many of the strengths identified in the self-assessment report. However, the

report failed to identify some significant weaknesses.

GRADES

Engineering	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- wide range of opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace
- frequent, well-planned reviews of trainees' progress
- good promotion of equal opportunities to trainees and employers
- well-planned and systematic internal verification

KEY WEAKNESSES

- low rates of retention and achievement for trainees on other work-based learning programmes
- little co-ordination of training in the workplace and training at college
- lack of information about workplace training in many individual learning plans
- inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace and with subcontractors
- failure to follow some quality assurance procedures
- no arrangements for monitoring and evaluating subcontractors

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more systematic communications and record-keeping
- higher proportion of advanced modern apprentices to remain in training

THE PROVIDER AND ITS CONTEXT

1. ISIS Training Services Limited (ISIS Training) is a subsidiary of Oxford and District Training Group Limited (ODTG). ODTG established ISIS Training 10 years ago to provide training for apprentices based with its member companies. ISIS also provides other services, including advice on health and safety, to ODTG's members and on a commercial basis to other organisations. ISIS Training operates from offices in Long Hanborough, Witney, Oxfordshire. It has four full-time staff and currently provides training in engineering for 74 trainees. ISIS Training's staff carry out all progress reviews and assessments, except for assessments in telecommunications, which are subcontracted to another training provider. The company subcontracts training to four local further education colleges.

2. Training is funded through a contract with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Local Learning and Skills Council (LLSC). The rate of unemployment in Oxfordshire is low, at 1 per cent, compared with 3.3 per cent nationally. Minority ethnic groups comprise 3.3 per cent of the population of Oxfordshire, compared with 6.2 per cent of the population nationally. In 2000, the proportion of school leavers in Oxfordshire achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 50 per cent, compared with the national average of 49.2 per cent.

THE INSPECTION

3. A team of four inspectors spent a total of 12 days at ISIS Training during May 2001. They interviewed 26 trainees, conducted six interviews with ISIS Training's staff, visited 12 employers, and interviewed 11 workplace supervisors. Inspectors observed training and assessment. They examined a range of written material, including trainees' portfolios of evidence, trainees' records, the company's plans, policies and procedures, promotional literature and awarding bodies' reports. Inspectors also studied ISIS Training's self-assessment report, which had last been updated in August 2000.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
Total	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	74	3

4. ISIS Training has 74 trainees. Fifty-three are advanced modern apprentices and 21 are young people working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) on other work-based training programmes. All the trainees are following programmes in engineering, including mechanical, electrical, telecommunications and aeronautical engineering, and all are employed. Trainees are recruited through careers fairs at schools, advertising by ISIS Training in local newspapers, direct advertising by employers and referral from employers and the careers service. ISIS Training invites all applicants to an interview and an initial assessment, which are used to identify the most appropriate employment and learning programme for them. Applicants are also advised about suitable careers in engineering. For applicants who are not already employed, the company arranges interviews with suitable employers. The employers then decide whether to offer them employment with training. The advanced modern apprentices take up to four years to achieve their apprenticeship framework. They attend a further education college full time for the first year and work towards a level 2 NVQ in foundation engineering. Once they have completed their level 2 NVQ, they receive training in the workplace towards a level 3 NVQ and attend a further education college for one day a week to follow a craft or national certificate course. They also work towards the relevant key skills awards throughout their training. The trainees on other work-based training programmes for young people take between two and three years to complete their NVQs. They begin working towards their NVQs in the workplace. Many also attend a further education college for one day a week to follow a craft or a national certificate course. There are work-based assessments and progress reviews for trainees every four weeks.

The table below shows the achievement and retention rates of trainees since 1997.

Work-based learning for young people								
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started	24		25		18		16	
Still in training	13	54	14	56	14	78	12	75
AMA framework completed	4	17	1	4	0	0	0	0
NVQ level 2 completed	16	67	18	72	9	50	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	4	17	1	4	0	0	0	0

NVQ Training								
NVQ Training								
	1997-98		1998-99		1999-2000		2000-01	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Number that started	31		22		29		13	
Still in training	0	0	2	9	8	28	11	85
Individual learning plan completed	13	42	7	32	8	28	1	8
Left without completing individual learning plan	18	58	12	55	12	41	1	8
NVQ level 2 completed	12	39	6	27	4	14	0	0
NVQ level 3 completed	3	10	5	23	5	17	1	8

STRENGTHS

- wide range of opportunities for learning and assessment in the workplace
- good opportunities to achieve additional qualifications on other work-based training programmes
- frequent, well-planned reviews of trainees' progress
- effective monitoring of first-year advanced modern apprentices' progress at college
- effective support of trainees by the training provider and employers

WEAKNESSES

- lack of detail in many individual learning plans
- late gathering of evidence for key skills
- uncertainty among some trainees about the progress they are making
- low rates of retention and achievement for trainees on other work-based learning programmes

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- higher retention rate for advanced modern apprentices

5. Most of the trainees work for large organisations. This gives them experience of working in a variety of different areas and using a range of equipment. Trainees develop a broad range of skills and have many opportunities for assessment. The range of companies with which ISIS Training works, enables it to ensure that trainees are placed with suitable employers.

6. Most of the trainees on other work-based training programmes are following a craft

or a national certificate course in addition to working towards their NVO. Many go on to study for higher-level qualifications after completing their programmes. All trainees can attend training courses offered by their employers. In addition, they can attend ISIS Training's commercial courses free of charge.

7. Assessment and progress reviews are frequent and well-planned, a strength identified in ISIS Training's self-assessment report. They take place every four weeks and the dates are set and notified to trainees and employers at the start of each year, which enables all those involved to plan ahead. The dates are flexible and can be changed to accommodate opportunities for assessment as they arise. Trainees are set achievable short-term targets at their progress reviews and the extent to which these are achieved is monitored at subsequent reviews. Internal verification is well-planned and systematic.

8. The colleges which advanced modern apprentices attend during their first year have good facilities. Trainees keep records of their progress. College staff check the records and keep copies of them on file. The files are comprehensive and up to date and they help staff to monitor trainees' progress effectively. ISIS Training's staff visit trainees at the colleges on a regular basis.

9. As identified in the self-assessment report, trainees receive good support from the company's staff. ISIS Training's staff are qualified and experienced in a broad range of engineering activities. The pastoral support given to trainees with personal difficulties has enabled them to continue with their training. In one instance, ISIS Training has reduced a trainee's workload by suspending the requirement to attend college for additional qualifications. In another, the employer and ISIS Training have worked together to overcome difficulties which had resulted in poor timekeeping and attendance, so preventing dismissal. Employers allow trainees to spend time on their portfolios while they are at work. The quality of most portfolios is good. Employers willingly accommodate visits by ISIS Training's staff and ensure that trainees have opportunities to achieve their short-term targets. ISIS Training carries out an initial assessment of trainees' basic skills and the company's training officers provide some help with basic skills for those who need it. Trainees with more extensive needs receive help with basic skills at college during the first year of their training.

10. Many individual learning plans do not contain enough information about training in the workplace. A few employers have written training plans, but most trainees do not have a structured plan for learning in the workplace. Employers and workplace supervisors are keen to support the trainees and will arrange activities for them to gain the experience they need to meet the requirements of their NVOs. However, this is seldom planned in advance and some employers are unaware of the need to move trainees into different areas of work to gain the skills required for their qualifications. A lack of long-term planning from the start of training leads to trainees failing to gather enough evidence of competences acquired in the workplace. Trainees undertake an initial assessment before they start their training. The results are used to identify an appropriate programme but they are not always used to shape the individual learning plan. Additional learning needs are inadequately recorded.

11. Trainees do not start to gather evidence of key skills until they are near the end of their programmes, which the self-assessment report accurately identified as a weakness. Most advanced modern apprentices do not start to gather evidence for key skills until the third or fourth year of training. Some trainees believe that their training officer will collate the evidence for them, using evidence from further education courses which they have followed. Trainees now have a two-day induction which provides information on key skills. This has improved recent trainees' understanding of the requirements. Employers do not adequately understand the requirements of the NVQ or key skills. They therefore have difficulty identifying opportunities for gathering evidence.

12. Some trainees are unclear about the progress they are making towards their NVQ. Many do not understand that they can complete their NVQ before the target date if they are in a position to do so. Trainees are helped to cross-reference the evidence required to support competences in key skills against other evidence in their portfolios and cross-reference it to the requirements of key skills. However, trainees do not start to do this until near the end of their programmes.

13. A low proportion of the trainees on other work-based training programmes achieve the targets in their individual learning plans. Of the 82 who started between 1997-98 and 1999-2000, only 29 achieved all their targets. Three transferred to advanced modern apprenticeships. Satisfactory proportions of the advanced modern apprentices remain in training and achieve their qualifications. The proportion of advanced modern apprentices who remain in training is increasing.

Good Practice

One employer has set up a committee of trainees, which is chaired by the workplace supervisor. This committee discusses trainees' work at college and the scheduling of training in the workplace, and resolves issues of concern. A member of ISIS Training's staff also attends the meetings.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

14. ISIS Training is a wholly owned subsidiary of ODTG. ODTG is a registered not-for-profit organisation, managed by a board comprising representatives of its members. ISIS Training's offices are on a business park in Long Hanborough. There are four full-time staff, the managing director, the company secretary and two training officers/assessors. Two subcontracted staff deal with finance and health and safety. ISIS Training subcontracts training to four local further education colleges. It also subcontracts the assessment of advanced modern apprentices in telecommunications engineering to another training provider. ISIS Training has an equal opportunities policy and a policy and procedures for assuring quality. The managing director takes overall responsibility for equal opportunities and quality assurance. The company produced its first self-assessment report in August 1999 and produced an updated report in August 2000.

STRENGTHS

- well-qualified and experienced training officers
- well-considered action to increase participation by trainees from under-represented groups
- effective promotion of equal opportunities to trainees and employers
- responsiveness to the feedback from trainees
- well-planned and effective internal verification

WEAKNESSES

- lack of knowledge of NVQs among workplace supervisors
- little co-ordination of training in the workplace with training at college
- failure of the equal opportunities policy to cover current legislation
- inadequate monitoring of equal opportunities in the workplace and with subcontractors
- failure to follow some procedures for assuring quality
- no arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of subcontractors
- insufficient gathering of feedback from employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more systematic communication, both internally and externally
- more thorough recording of internal verifiers' feedback to assessors

15. The two full-time training officers/assessors are well qualified and have wide and relevant experience. They understand the industry and give good advice and support to trainees and employers, a strength identified in the self-assessment report.

16. As identified in the self-assessment report, many workplace supervisors do not know

enough about NVQs and cannot, therefore, assess the progress trainees are making towards achieving their NVQs. ISIS Training has arranged briefing sessions for employers, and some workplace supervisors have attended an assessors' course, but these initiatives have only gone a small way to redressing the situation. One workplace supervisor was unaware that a trainee was progressing to a level 3 NVQ and that the current job would not provide enough experience for him to achieve this.

17. There is little co-ordination of training in the workplace with training at college and the self-assessment report did not identify this as a weakness. Employers are not aware of the content of courses which trainees are following at college. They are, therefore, unable to link activities in the workplace to the teaching of theory at college. Except during the first year of the advanced modern apprenticeship, trainees' progress at college is not monitored thoroughly enough. Progress reviews are not used to make links between training in the workplace and training at college.

18. Much of the communication between company staff and between company staff and subcontractors is unstructured and records are not always kept of meetings and conversations. This makes the monitoring and evaluation of information difficult.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

19. ISIS Training has implemented various initiatives to attract trainees from groups under-represented on its training programmes. The company has sponsored advertisements on the radio promoting engineering for women and for people from minority ethnic groups. It has also established links with local organisations representing minority ethnic groups. The company collects data on trainees' gender, ethnicity and disabilities and uses these when planning its efforts to broaden participation.

20. The company has introduced effective training in equal opportunities into the induction programme for trainees. Existing trainees who have not benefited from this will be required to attend the new course. ISIS Training has shown a video from the course to employers at a breakfast meeting and some employers have asked the company to run the full course for their staff. All staff at ISIS Training have had training in equal opportunities.

21. ISIS Training has a policy on equal opportunities. The policy document, written in 1999, is divided into sections dealing with various aspects of the company's activities. The policy does not cover all current legislation relating to equal opportunities and it is not clear whether it applies to all trainees.

22. ISIS Training's staff discuss harassment and fair treatment with their trainees at each progress review. Trainees understand what constitutes harassment and what to do if they are treated unfairly. However, the company fails to ensure that employers and subcontractors have appropriate policies on equal opportunities or that these are being applied. Inspectors found posters in some trainees' workplaces which some people find offensive. ISIS Training has raised this issue at breakfast meetings with employers but has not taken it up with the individual companies concerned.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

23. ISIS Training has a policy and procedures for assuring quality. However, quality assurance activities are often unplanned and unstructured. The most recent review of the quality assurance policy took place in 1999. ISIS Training does not systematically evaluate or review its procedures for assuring quality. It also fails to follow some of its procedures fully. For example, the monthly assessors' and internal verifiers' meetings and the monthly meetings of staff do not always take place and, when they do, they are not always minuted. There are no written arrangements to monitor subcontractors' performance. Only one subcontractor has signed a service level agreement.

24. ISIS Training has produced two self-assessment reports. All staff contribute to the self-assessment but there is no involvement of employers and subcontractors. The most recent report overestimates the significance of many strengths and does not identify some important weaknesses. The action plan produced following the first report sets specific and demanding targets, but the company does not systematically monitor progress towards these. Many of the targets have not been achieved and there has been no attempt to identify the reasons for this lack of progress and no action taken to remedy the situation.

25. ISIS Training uses questionnaires to obtain trainees' views on their training. Six weeks after starting their training, the trainees complete questionnaires about their induction. They also complete questionnaires at the end of each year of their programme. The company has responded well to trainees' comments. For example, the induction programme has been strengthened significantly. All trainees have the opportunity to comment on their programmes at the monthly reviews of their progress and this has led to improvements. ISIS Training, however, does not actively seek the views of workplace supervisors and managers. Workplace supervisors have the opportunity to raise issues during reviews of trainees' progress, but these discussions are mainly about individuals' progress.

26. Three staff at ISIS Training are qualified assessors and two are qualified internal verifiers. Internal verification is planned systematically. Internal verifiers keep a record of their visits to ensure that they monitor the assessment of all trainees. However, internal verifiers rarely record their feedback to assessors. Since 1997, ISIS Training has been a member of a regional network which meets to share good practice and to disseminate information. Speakers from awarding bodies also attend this forum.

Good Practice

The company has introduced a newsletter for employers. This carries interesting and relevant information about training programmes and the government's policies on training. It is also used to celebrate trainees' achievements. The newsletter is professionally presented and informative.