

INSPECTION REPORT

ISIS Training Services Limited Reinspection

22 January 2003



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. 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 **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- learning and job preparation programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

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

SUMMARY

The provider

ISIS Training Services Limited (ISIS) is a subsidiary of Oxford & District Training Group (ODTG). ODTG is an employer-owned engineering group training organisation and has been in operation for 28 years, offering training for its member companies throughout Oxfordshire. Basic engineering skills training is subcontracted to local further education colleges. ISIS was established 12 years ago to operate outside the confines of the charitable status of ODTG and now delivers all the training. The parent company now has no paid staff. ISIS currently works with a much broader range of organisations, many of which are not members of ODTG. ISIS offers, in addition to local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded programmes, an assessment and recruitment service for local employers. ISIS also offers a wide range of full-cost training programmes for local engineering companies. The organisation employs four staff, three of whom have been recruited since the full inspection in May 2001. All assessment and verification is carried out by these staff.

Overall judgement

The original inspection in May 2001 judged that the training in engineering was satisfactory, as were the arrangements for equality of opportunity. However, the leadership and management and quality assurance were unsatisfactory. By the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory or better.

Grades awarded

	Original	Reinspection
Leadership and management	4	2
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity	3	3
Quality assurance	4	2

	Original	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following key strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

KEY STRENGTHS

- well-managed training
- good work placements
- good monitoring of subcontractors
- frequent and well-planned and executed progress reviews
- good action to increase recruitment and widen participation

KEY WEAKNESSES

- weak understanding of programme structure and content by learners
- no detail in individual learning plans

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of data and feedback from learners and employers
- increase retention rates on all programmes

THE REINSPECTION

1. Reinspection was carried out in two stages. A total of six inspection days was used. The first visit was on 22nd January 2003 and the final visit was completed on 10, 11 and 12 March 2003. Inspectors studied the self-assessment report and post-inspection action plans, visited employers and subcontracted colleges, and interviewed learners and workplace supervisors, as well as studying a wide range of documents.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
Total	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	4

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- well-managed training
- good support from employers for training
- well-planned and effective internal verification processes
- good action to increase recruitment and widen participation
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- comprehensive policies and procedures covering key processes in training

WEAKNESSES

- no knowledge of the modern apprenticeship framework by some employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of data and feedback from learners and employers
- increase retention rates on all programmes

2. Since the inspection of May 2001, ISIS has made a considerable effort to resolve the weaknesses identified. Three of the four staff are newly recruited and have brought with them additional skills and expertise to improve the quality of training. Training is well managed with clear structures that are consistent across all employers. There are regular review meetings scheduled a year in advance and employers and learners have calendars for these meetings. Assessments are similarly planned and co-ordinated. Assessors meet each month to discuss the learners' progress. ISIS now has good subcontracting arrangements with the four further education colleges it uses for the off-the-job elements of the programmes. Staff frequently and regularly visit the colleges to meet with staff and learners. They observe teaching sessions and give feedback to staff and act to resolve problems which may occur. Employers are given details of the visits and, in some cases, also take part in the meetings and observations of sessions.

3. Employers are very supportive of the training and good working relationships exist between ISIS staff and the workplace supervisors. Many employers have a good understanding of their role in providing assessment opportunities and co-operate effectively with assessors. In one company, two workplace supervisors have completed their own portfolios of evidence for the national vocational qualification (NVQ) at level 3 to improve their knowledge of the processes and requirements of the award. If opportunities for the development and assessment of particular skills are not available in an organisation, arrangements are made for learners to move to another company

where they can gain the skill and be assessed. In two adjacent companies, one has provided a room and computer equipment where learners from both companies can work together on common elements of their programmes. Employers are actively involved in recruitment events organised by ISIS and give presentations and career information. The events are often at town centre locations, but in one case an employer's premises was used and the employer offered refreshments and a tour of their facilities. However, some employers have little understanding of the modern apprenticeship framework. They are unclear about the assessment practices and the relationship between on- and off-the-job training. They still think that the college component is the main element and consequently transfer this view to the learners.

4. All staff have annual appraisals with their line manager and staff training is closely linked to the appraisal process. ISIS was accredited with the Investor in People standard in July 2001. This is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

5. ISIS now has a sound data management process and regularly collects reliable information. However, the information is not used as a basis for decisions made at assessor and management meetings, such as targeting actions to improve retention rates and an analysis of early leavers.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

6. ISIS has a recently updated equal opportunities policy, which now includes current legislation. Policies to deal with bullying, harassment, complaints and appeals are given to learners in a comprehensive information pack during induction. Learners are familiar with and confident in the use of the associated procedures. All staff have attended training in equal opportunities. ISIS collects and analyses information about gender and ethnicity of learners. Recruitment of women into engineering remains difficult, but recruitment of learners from minority ethnic groups is above the average population figure for Oxfordshire. This is recognised in the self-assessment report.

7. New recruitment materials show positive images of under-represented groups working in a variety of engineering occupations. ISIS has recently organised a series of recruitment roadshows in key locations around Oxfordshire with over 350 people from family groups attending. These were marketed by mailshots to the home address of year 11 and year 12 pupils in Oxfordshire.

8. Equality of opportunity is discussed with learners during their induction and is reinforced during the frequent progress reviews. Elements of the equal opportunities training are delivered to employers, and monitoring of the workplace is a formal part of the employer selection. It is also constantly reviewed during the assessors' visits to the workplaces.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

9. Comprehensive quality assurance policies and procedures have been implemented since the original inspection and all staff have copies and have been trained in their use. Effective policies to improve the quality of training are in place for all the key processes in the training cycle. Also there is a comprehensive disaster recovery policy for data, equipment and key staff. There is an annual audit and updating cycle for all quality assurance policies, and records are maintained and up to date. Risk assessments in the workplace are also reviewed each year with the help of a health and safety consultant. Members of the training group are offered a free check by this consultant and are also given help and assistance with writing their own policies if required.

10. There is a systematic and thorough internal verification process in place. Procedures are well recorded and exceed the requirements for each of the awarding bodies. It is standard practice to sample regularly throughout the assessment process, including the observation of assessment. All assessment is carried out by ISIS training officers, and is often combined with the monthly progress review. Internal verifiers give constructive feedback to the assessors. Learners are aware of the process and a well-structured sampling plan is in place.

11. The self-assessment process is carried out each year and involves all staff. It is an integral part of the ISIS management system. The most recent report was developed in June 2002 and there are clear links to the development plan which was produced in July 2002. Self assessment is accurate and compares favourably with inspection findings. The development plan in July 2001 focused on the problems highlighted in the inspection report and many of the actions have progressed well. Progress against the development plan is closely monitored at the monthly staff meetings. The local LSC has given good help and support throughout this process. The views of employers and learners are collected on a range of topics at various points in the training cycle and are used as a basis for the self-assessment report.

Good Practice

ISIS actively supports its subcontracted colleges to enable courses to run. In two cases where enrolments were too low for the course to be viable, ISIS has provided extra funds and support so that learners could complete their training.

ISIS has formed effective links with local schools by providing specialist engineering equipment and expertise to promote engineering skills and careers in the schools.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	71	3

During the reinspection process, the inspection team identified the following strengths, weaknesses and other improvements needed:

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- frequent, well-planned and executed progress reviews
- good portfolios of evidence

WEAKNESSES

- weak understanding of programme structure and content by learners
- no detail in individual learning plans

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- maintain frequency of assessment by observation in the workplace

12. Most of the learners are employed by large companies working in high technology areas. This gives learners a wide range of experience in using a broad range of ultra-modern manufacturing and production machinery and equipment. Many learners have delegated mentors who are fully involved in their development. On-the-job training is well structured and there are many opportunities for learners to gain skills beyond the requirements of the NVQ or apprenticeship framework. Employers are very supportive of the training and frequently allow learners to spend time on their portfolios of evidence, and provide study facilities in the workplace. Learners are encouraged to take up the additional qualifications on offer. Some employers provide additional support for learners through further, and in some cases, higher education.

13. Reviews are frequent and well planned. They are scheduled at the beginning of a training year and are carried out at four-weekly intervals. Learners are set realistic targets and goals for achievement and their progress is effectively managed. All reviews are recorded and records are held by learners, employers and the provider. Employers

are fully involved in the review process and the working relationship between the reviewing officers and learners is mutually supportive. Learners are confident and happy with their development and highly appreciative of the support given by ISIS staff.

14. Learners' portfolios of evidence are good and learners are encouraged by assessors and workplace supervisors to take pride in their work. Assessors comment on the learners' basic skills and promote good presentation skills. There is extensive use of digital photography in portfolios and appropriate endorsement by authorised witness testimony. Learners record and include a broad range of appropriate activity to form the evidence for assessment.

15. Most of the learners are advanced modern apprentices or on NVQ training. There are only three foundation modern apprentices. The achievement rate for advanced modern apprentices in 1998-99, the most recent intake to complete, is 68 per cent, and is 56 per cent for the 1999-2000 intake, with eight learners still in learning. The achievement rate for NVQ training for 1999-2000, the most recent intake to complete, is 62 per cent.

16. All modern apprentices spend the initial part of their training working towards the NVQ in performing engineering operations at level 2 for a period of nine months at local further education colleges. These colleges also offer support for basic skills, as well as key skills at level 2. Learners are given a basic skills test at induction and, if needed, additional support is given on an individual basis. Since the original inspection, ISIS has also introduced a key skills initial assessment which takes place on its own premises. ISIS is a recognised key skills assessment centre and offers support sessions and assessments for all learners.

17. Learners do not fully understand the programme structure and content. Learners in the second year of the programme could not accurately define their NVQ, neither could they identify which component or stage they had reached. Most learners find it difficult to identify how much work remains to be completed for the NVQ and most identified the knowledge component as the major part of the apprenticeship framework. This lack of understanding results in most learners being unable to achieve the NVQ within the timescale. The good level of motivation built up during the first year of off-the-job training is lost by the poor knowledge and understanding of the qualification and programme structure.

18. Individual learning plans have insufficient detail. The results of initial assessment are used to screen learners but are not always used as a basis for the individual learning plan. There is insufficient focus on short- and medium-term milestones, although this is mostly compensated for by the recent inclusion of a monitoring sheet in the learners' portfolios. Some employers have written training plans for the on-the-job training, but others do not. Learners who do not have a structured plan are disadvantaged and have difficulty identifying how far they are towards achievement of the NVQ.

19. Due to staff changes, there has been some late introduction of observations in the

workplace. New assessors are dealing with this change in the regular pattern of assessment. Some learners have completed their foundation training and are now progressing with the on-the-job training, but they still have not been observed carrying out everyday tasks. The learners have no registered achievements beyond the level 2 foundation qualification as yet.