

INSPECTION REPORT

PSC Training and Development Limited Reinspection

05 August 2002



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 **learnirect** 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

PSC Training and Development is a privately owned company which provides work-based learning for young people in construction, engineering, business administration and in retailing, customer service and transportation funded by Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council. At reinspection the number of learners has increased by 42 per cent, to 327. One hundred and seventy-two are foundation modern apprentices, and 54 are advanced modern apprentices. The remainder are on other work-based learning programmes leading to national vocational qualifications (NVQs). One hundred and thirty-three learners are employed. Eighty-seven learners have additional social or learning needs and most are referred by Connexions.

PSC Training and Development has a board of three directors. The managing director leads a team of 28 full-time and seven part-time staff. Training and assessment are carried out at either PSC Training and Development's training centre or in the workplace.

Overall judgement

The ALI's inspection in June 2001 found that training for learners in retailing, customer service and transportation was good and it was satisfactory in construction. However, the training in engineering, technology and manufacturing and in business administration, management and professional were unsatisfactory, as were the organisation's leadership and management of provision, including its arrangements for quality assurance and equality of opportunity. At the end of the reinspection process, all aspects of the provision were found to be satisfactory apart from quality assurance which remains unsatisfactory.

Grades awarded

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

	Original	Reinspection
Construction	3	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	3	3

PSC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT LIMITED REINSPECTION

	Original	Reinspection
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Business administration, management & professional	4	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	4	3

	Original	Reinspection
Retailing, customer service & transportation	2	3
Contributory grades:		
Work-based learning for young people	2	3

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

KEY STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good off-the-job training and resources
- effective leadership through a period of considerable change
- good use of management information in decision-making
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity
- well-focused staff appraisal and training

KEY WEAKNESSES

- weak assessment practices
- slow progress towards achievement of qualifications by some learners
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- insufficient understanding of equality of opportunity by some employers
- insufficient impact of new quality assurance procedures on training
- poor management of internal verification

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more challenging targets in review and assessment processes
- more systematic sharing of good practice across areas of learning
- better guidance for learners on portfolio-building
- more extended role for staff mentors

THE REINSPECTION

1. Reinspection was carried out in four stages. Six inspectors spent a total of 23 days reinspecting PSC Training and Development (PSC) between August 2002 and February 2003. The first visit was on 30 August 2002. The other stages were completed on 5-7 November 2002, 13-15 January and 10-14 February 2003. Inspectors observed and graded 12 learning sessions. They interviewed 104 learners during off-the-job training sessions and at their workplaces. Inspectors examined the revised self-assessment report and development plan which was written after the previous inspection. They also looked at a range of the company's paperwork including the new policies manual, and 37 learners' portfolios and individual learning plans.

Grades awarded to learning sessions at the original inspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	3
Business administration, management & professional	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Total	0	4	4	2	0	1	0	11

Grades awarded to learning sessions at reinspection

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Construction	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	5
Business administration, management & professional	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	5	1	5	1	0	0	12

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

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

STRENGTHS

- good leadership through a period of considerable change
- detailed and clearly focused business plan
- good use of management information in decision-making
- well-focused staff appraisal and training
- effective promotion of equality of opportunity

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient impact of new quality assurance arrangements on training
- poor management of internal verification
- insufficient understanding of equal opportunities by some employers

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more challenging targets in progress reviews
- more systematic sharing of good practice
- additional monitoring of employers' equality of opportunity practices
- extended role of staff mentors

2. There is good management of change. Since the original inspection in June 2001, a new managing director has been appointed and new posts of management information manager and training quality assurance manager have been created. PSC has moved to modern premises where there are effective training workshops. At the same time PSC lost its largest contract for adult training, which resulted in a substantial loss of income. The structure of the organisation has changed considerably to resolve problems which were identified in the original inspection and to allow staff to have greater involvement in the management and operation of the organisation. The changes have been well managed. Directors and managers have demonstrated good leadership in making substantial changes to PSC's structure and staffing, while maintaining staff morale and learners' progress. PSC's resources have been managed effectively. The resources needed for the continuation and improvement of training and assessment have been provided. Throughout the process of change there has been effective communication between the managing director and staff. There has been extensive consultation with all staff before decisions have been made and the views of staff have been taken into consideration.

3. All PSC's staff are involved in the development of PSC's business plan. The plan

focuses on increasing growth and development as well as a commitment to provide good services for learners. There are realistic and achievable targets for retention and achievement rates, and for increased participation rates by under-represented groups.

4. Management information is used effectively in decision-making. Monthly reports have detailed analysis, and commentary are produced for the management team. These data compare starters, leavers, retention and achievement rates in each area of learning against the contract, target and previous performance. Area of learning teams assess trends in performance and develop strategies to improve learners' performance, in particular the retention and achievement rates.

5. There is an effective system for staff appraisal which is based on reviewing individual performance, and most staff have had a recent appraisal. Staff have an annual appraisal with their line manager and a six-monthly review of progress. Staff assess their own performance against a list of criteria and discuss this at the appraisal meeting. Their performance is graded, key strengths and weaknesses are identified and an action plan with targets for future performance and development needs is agreed. Many staff have taken part in training and development activities which have benefited them and the organisation, and improved the learners' experiences. Good links with employers enable staff to gain experience in the latest techniques and the use of up-to-date equipment to improve their teaching. A number of staff have recently gained teaching qualifications. There is little sharing of good practice between different areas of learning. All new staff have a mentor, but they tend to give pastoral support rather than professional development.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

6. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is updated each year. Overall responsibility for the promotion and monitoring of equal opportunities lies with the equal opportunities co-ordinator. There have been a number of initiatives to promote equal opportunities. Promotional events have been held to attract women into engineering and construction training. Learners' induction to equal opportunities is comprehensive and their understanding is reinforced at progress review meetings. Learners who started their training before the new induction process are retrained in equal opportunities. PSC's staff have received equal opportunities training and this is now offered to employers and workplace supervisors. Care is taken to ensure that marketing material does not contain photographs representing stereotypical images of male and female roles in the workplace. The material contains positive images of people with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups.

7. PSC now takes sufficient action to ensure that all new employers and learners understand and promote equal opportunities, but there is still insufficient understanding of equal opportunities among some employers and learners. Employers' promotion of equal opportunities are still not effectively monitored, in particular those who have been associated with PSC for some time. Data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability are collected and analysed. Targets are set to improve the proportions of learners from under-represented groups on programmes, but there is inadequate representation of men on some programmes and of women on others.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

8. There has been insufficient impact of new quality assurance arrangements on training. PSC's quality assurance policy is defined in a new procedures manual which was prepared after the original inspection. The procedures manual contains sections on staff, the company's procedures and policies, training, learners and documents. Staff are consulted in its preparation and many are involved in piloting and reviewing the new procedures. Compliance with the procedures is satisfactory. However, some teams are more reluctant to change, but there has been a general improvement in the planning of training. Since October 2002, the policies and procedures have been used to monitor the quality of provision, but quality assurance statements do not describe how activities should be carried out and few targets are set to monitor the quality of training. Quality control procedures contain a schedule for most of the company's monitoring events, but there are few written criteria against which quality can be judged. Monitoring includes observation of training, assessment and learners' progress reviews. Feedback to trainers and assessors is detailed and includes actions agreed as a result of the feedback. The observation paperwork is not yet analysed to identify strengths and weaknesses across the organisation. Regular checks on learners' files have recently been introduced, but the quality of some of the information is not monitored. The observation of training has not been extended to the training which is carried out by employers in the workplace.

9. Internal verification is poorly managed and is not consistent across all areas of learning. Some staff do not understand the principles of internal verification. A revised internal verification policy has been introduced, but progress toward its adoption is slow. Internal verifiers do not identify instances of poor assessment practice. Feedback to assessors is often poor and focuses more on the performance of the learner rather than the performance of the assessor. There are arrangements for assessors and verifiers to be trained on the revised assessor and verifier qualification and standards.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	96	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good work placements
- good training
- good off-the-job training resources

WEAKNESSES

- ineffective monitoring of learners' progress
- poor achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices
- poor target-setting for learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of internal verification to improve standards
- more support for staff to develop better working practices
- better guidance for learners on portfolio-building
- wider range of learning materials

10. Learners have good work placements with local construction employers who offer a wide range of work experience. Some learners work on construction projects of long duration while others move from site to site each week or daily on refurbishment and maintenance contracts. Most work placements offer a wide range of opportunities for learners to gain extensive experience. Employers are positive about the training given by PSC and consider that it makes a good contribution to improving skills shortages in the construction industry locally. Most employers have work-based supervisors who carry out the dual role of mentor and work-based recorder for the NVQ and take a keen interest in learners' progress. They participate in learners' progress reviews and contribute to planning the range of site experience to be covered before the next

review. Most employers understand the NVQ training programme and their responsibility to provide a good training experience for learners. Since the original inspection PSC's staff have improved work experience for learners by checking that employers can provide the full range of occupational competences to meet the requirements of the NVQ. This is checked when a new learner is signed up and confirmed during a follow up visit four weeks later. Improvements have been made to arrange alternative work placements if employers are unable to provide the full range of training. During progress reviews, assessors check the relevance of work-based evidence to ensure it complies with the requirements of the NVQ.

11. Work placements are effective links between on- and off-the-job training. Assessors discuss the training covered in the workplace as part of the review process and match it to the learners' qualification. Learners are encouraged to practise their skills during off-the-job training and develop the skills they need for the workplace. They are also encouraged to record the training in their portfolio. Sometimes employers ask assessors to arrange specific training for learners to develop their skills for particular jobs on site. Learners are complimentary about the support they receive from instructors and assessors. Off-the-job training is well planned. Since the original inspection, a new system of lesson planning has been introduced. Schemes of work are prepared for the whole year, with structured lesson plans to match the weekly schemes of work. Learners identify which lessons they have attended in their portfolio. New instructors and assessors are assigned an experienced assessor as a mentor who supports them at review visits, training sessions and assessment. Instructors use a good range of techniques to check that learning takes place. There is particularly good use of oral questioning during reviews, training sessions and on-site assessment. Assessors record answers from learners, but they are not always included in the learners' portfolio. Some staff attend dissemination of good practice events which enables them to share good training and assessment practice with other training providers. There is good health and safety practice in the training centre and in the workplace and this is checked during progress reviews. Assessors ensure that employers observe good health and safety practice and that learners use appropriate personal protective equipment.

12. Resources for off-the-job training are good. Since the original inspection, PSC has moved to new premises which have good facilities for practical training and background knowledge sessions, but space is limited in some areas. An external area has been developed for brickwork which is a realistic working environment. There is an adequate range of workshop tools, although some are near the end of their useful life. A small woodworking machine workshop has been created for the preparation of materials and for learners to experience the use of portable power tools in a dust-free environment. Textbooks are available for learners to use, but quantities are still limited. There is a general lack of learning materials for instructors and learners. Instructors make good use of classrooms for background knowledge sessions and use a range of resources and visual aids to make learning more interesting. Learners are encouraged to use photographic evidence to enhance their portfolios. Some inexperienced instructors and assessors have recently joined PSC and some have not done development work to improve their training and assessment skills.

13. Learners are unaware of how well they are progressing towards their NVQ. They often struggle to achieve the full qualification in the given timescale. Work presented in portfolios is generally poor. It is usually poorly organised and presentation is untidy and this makes it difficult for learners' to determine how much work they have to do to achieve the qualification. Portfolios contain copies of learners' reviews but there is no clear link between the review and progress towards achievement. There are no monitoring sheets to help learners monitor their own progress. Trainers give insufficient support to learners on how to build their portfolios with a good range of diverse evidence. The internal verification is weak and some learners become aware that they need further training and assessment after their training has finished. A few learners who are near the end of their qualification have yet to start work on key skills. Learners are given very little feedback to encourage them to progress. Since the original inspection this has improved and new procedures have been implemented to review and record progress.

14. Achievements rates for foundation modern apprentices are poor. In 2001-02, 20 per cent of learners completed the full modern apprenticeship framework. Forty per cent of learners on NVQ programmes achieved the qualification. Some of those who started a foundation modern apprenticeship achieved the NVQ or an intermediate construction award instead. During the first half of 2002-03, achievement rates for foundation modern apprentices have improved to 56 per cent. Some foundation modern apprentices make slow progress towards achieving their qualification. Few learners achieve a key skills qualification and little use is made of workplace evidence for key skills. Some learners are exempt from key skills due to prior attainment, but this is not systematically recorded. Some learners who have poor timekeeping are not always challenged, although there is a good system in place to report absence to employers.

15. Learners are not set clear targets to help them achieve their qualification. Some assessors set targets, but they are not systematically recorded and followed up at the next review. Some targets are set for employers about the range of work learners need to cover, but they are not recorded. Learners are questioned about their progress towards the key skills as part of the review, but there are no clear targets to help them achieve them. There is little evidence of learners being challenged to do better. Internal verification procedures are weak and there is no target-setting for learners and assessors.

Good Practice

An employer was unable to provide the range of work for a learner in fitting kitchen units. The assessor contacted another employer and arranged to transfer the learner to another contract which was able to offer the appropriate experience.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 3**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	84	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good training resources for welding
- good learning opportunities in the workplace
- effective relationships with employers to support learners

WEAKNESSES

- weak assessment practices
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- slow progress towards achievement of qualifications by some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more structured approach to internal verification
- more detailed recording of progress review action plans
- better employer awareness of health and safety practices
- more regular cross-referencing of portfolio evidence
- greater use of vocational evidence for key skills assessments

16. Learners gain experience from working with enthusiastic, experienced and occupationally well-qualified instructors, who provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to increase their employability. All learners have an initial assessment and those identified as needing additional learning support receive it. Staff who carry out the learning support sessions are suitably experienced and occupationally qualified. Learners have access to good fabrication and welding resources at PSC's training centre. The well-equipped workshops contain a range of up-to-date fabrication and welding machines including equipment for learners to carry out destruction tests on the sample welds they produce. This allows learners to ensure that their welding techniques meet industry standards and enables them to work on real products. For example, learners have designed and fabricated gates and manufactured complex

agricultural and marine equipment. The off-the-job training programme is well planned and is linked to practical applications which results in learners developing skills which are highly valued by their employers.

17. Learners have good opportunities to learn new skills in the workplace from suitably qualified and experienced supervisors. Some learners have the opportunity to work with different supervisors which gives them a wider range of learning experiences. Most workplaces have a wide range of up-to-date tools and equipment. The original inspection identified that the motor vehicle resources at PSC's training centre were poor. Learners now receive all their practical training in the workplace. PSC's training workshop is only used for training sessions to improve learners' understanding of associated knowledge and practical applications. However, the motor vehicle workshop is not well equipped. Vehicles are old, in poor condition and do not reflect current technology.

18. There are effective relationships with employers. PSC's work-placement officers are in regular contact with employers. Trainer/assessors give good advice and guidance to employers, which enables learners to achieve the targets on their individual learning plan. Most employers give good support to learners and take an interest in their progress. They are actively involved in learners' progress reviews which include meaningful discussions, to identify what learners have to do in order to make satisfactory progress. However, the outcomes of the discussion are not always adequately recorded with realistic and challenging short-term targets. Learners approach their trainers for advice, guidance and concerns about their training. For example, learners who were not receiving relevant training and where some aspects of the workplace were unsafe have been found more suitable workplaces by PSC. If an employer is unable to provide the relevant training for a learner, that learner is allowed to spend time with another employer to use specialist equipment.

19. Assessment of learners in the workplace is weak. Assessors do not accurately record a learner's performance and observation reports describe the learner's activities with little reference to the NVQ standards. When assessors record that learners have not achieved the standard, there is no action plan showing targets. Some workplace observations do not refer to the performance criteria during assessment. Assessors make good use of oral questioning to check background knowledge during observation, but the level of language is sometimes inappropriate for learners. Some assessments are interrupted by assessors asking questions, which prevents learners from carrying out their task effectively. Some assessors give frequent advice and guidance to learners during assessment. Although internal verification is planned, the activities to be carried out and the range of evidence to be sampled are not always clearly identified. Records are kept in different files and it is difficult to track the verification process. Some internal verification reports include insufficient constructive feedback on the assessors' performance. PSC has identified this weakness and has revised the internal verification procedures.

20. There is insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training. Most of the

employers have little understanding of the learner's NVQ programme. They have little awareness of the content of the off-the-job training at PSC's training centre. PSC have tried to resolve this weakness by producing off-the-job training schedules which are given to learners. However, the schedules are not always used by trainers and supervisors to link the on- and off-the-job training. Learners' activities in the workplace are often determined by production requirements and do not necessarily allow learners to develop the range of competences they need to achieve the NVQ.

21. Learners' portfolios contain well-presented evidence, but it is often not clearly referenced to specific performance objectives. Evidence sources include photographs and drawings of components and written descriptions of tasks learners have carried out at work. Some learners make slow progress towards achieving their qualification and achievement rates on some programmes have been poor. Although the proportion of learners who achieve the targets on their individual learning plan within the training period has improved since the original inspection, it is too early to judge the impact of the improved initial assessment, induction and review processes on successful completion and achievement rates.

22. Since the original inspection, PSC has improved the progress review process and revised many of the documents. In addition, to raise the awareness and improve learners' understanding of equal opportunities, PSC has held successful training courses which are well attended and valued by learners. Induction procedures have improved and place an increased emphasis on how to use evidence linked to engineering for the assessment of key skills.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	65	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good progress into employment
- effective work-placement planning
- well planned off-the-job training
- good retention rates

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient structured on-the-job training
- narrow range of assessment methods
- poor completion rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks
- some poor teaching accommodation

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better internal verification intervention
- more detailed target-setting
- increased frequency of workplace visits
- greater use of accreditation of prior experience
- wider use of professional discussion

23. Progress into employment is good. All learners who started in 1999 gained employment and 43 per cent progressed on to a higher qualification. In the following year, although the proportion fell to 80 per cent with 32 per cent progressing on to a higher level qualification, the numbers of learners were far larger. In 2001, 37 per cent of learners progressed into employment, but 54 per cent are still in learning. In 2002, only 9 per cent have gained employment, but 82 per cent are in a work placement.

24. There is effective work-placement planning with around 90 per cent of learners placed with a large local employer. PSC has regular discussions with the employer and

advertises vacancies through Connexions and with local newspapers. There is an initial interview by PSC followed by a joint interview with the employer. Successful applicants are sent a letter signed by PSC and the employer and are invited to start the induction process. A work placement is agreed and PSC formally introduces the learner to their line manager. There is a good 12-week induction which fully explains the working practices of the employer and what training will be given. Most learners spend four days each week at work and one day at PSC's training centre. There are similar arrangements with other smaller employers.

25. Off-the-job training is well planned. Teaching is good and responsive to learners' needs. Learners have a programme of sessions on background knowledge which also improve their social skills. Modules based on teamworking and time management, form an essential part of the curriculum. There are taught modules in equality of opportunity, health and safety and NVQ methodology. Guidance is given on writing assignments and there are regular portfolio support sessions.

26. Retention rates are good. For advanced modern apprentices, all those who started in 1999 were retained, falling to 83 per cent in the following year. For 2001, 90 per cent of learners are still in learning and in 2002 the only start is still there. Over the same period for foundation modern apprentices, 100 per cent and 60 per cent for the first two years and 74 and 92 per cent of learners are still in learning for the next two years.

27. There is little structured on-the-job training. Although there is some formal training in the employer's information technology (IT) system, there is little other training in the workplace. Line managers explain how to carry out tasks on a need-to-know basis, often at the last minute. There is little co-ordination between assessors and line managers and no real link between on- and off-the-job training. Learners often feel undervalued and confused by the differing levels of responsibility and work levels and hours worked in the same workplace. The role of the learner is at the discretion of the local line manager who also decides what access learners have to the courses in spreadsheets, word processing, supervisory skills, communication, secretarial duties, telephone skills and the various external IT courses. PSC does not plan these courses or try to relate them to the off-the-job training.

28. Assessors use a narrow range of assessment methods. Most portfolios rely on candidates' personal statements as the main source of evidence. In most cases, learners do not sign the statements and neither do employers or assessors to authenticate them. There is little use of diverse evidence such as examples of learners' work, employers' or peers' statements, records, photographs, work logs or authenticated diaries. There are good observations of everyday tasks. The mentor role to help newly appointed staff is confined to personal support of assessors and does not include professional development. As both main assessors are working towards their assessor qualifications, this is unhelpful to them.

29. Learners make slow progress towards the achievement of their qualification. Only

25 per cent of advanced modern apprentices who started in 2000 have completed the modern apprenticeship framework and there are no learners have completed it from the 2001 and 2002 intakes. For foundation modern apprentices, only 6 per cent of the 2000 intake completed the framework with no completions for the 2001 and 2002 intakes. Portfolios are not clearly referenced and some learners find it difficult to identify their level of progress. Key skills are often started late in the programme, although this is not the case with more recent learners. There is an increase in the achievement rate and in the six months ending January 2003, 55 per cent of all leavers completed the full framework.

30. The business administration classroom is badly sited. The classroom is a screened-off section of a larger room. During an observed session, office activity from another section of the room could be heard. Telephone calls were made and a meeting was held which meant that the lecturers and learners could not be heard during a presentation. One staff member also used the room as a short cut and another interrupted the session so a learner could sign a travel form. There was a further interruption when a staff member came in to check the notice board. These activities seriously undermined what was a well-planned and well-taught training session.

31. Interim internal verification does not identify assessment and progression problems early enough to enable PSC to take corrective action. PSC has recognised this and has implemented new procedures in January 2003. However, it is too early to evaluate their effect. Target-setting is not detailed and does not help learners to work to targets on a specific timescale as opposed to general aims. Currently assessors visit on a six- to eight-week cycle for a two-hour visit which includes an observation and a progress review. This reduces observation opportunities. Most learners see their assessor on a weekly basis at PSC if they are on a work placement, but other learners may only call in every three weeks, so there is not always enough regular contact.

32. Some learners have been in employment or training for some time before joining the scheme and already have good experience. However, there is little accreditation of prior experience to help learners assemble their evidence more effectively. This has been identified by PSC, which is taking corrective action. Other learners have part-time jobs related to customer service. Some learners find the reliance on written work difficult, but assessors do not use professional discussion to help learners assemble more evidence and present it in a way which is easier for them.

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

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	30	3

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

STRENGTHS

- good retention rates on all programmes
- effective off-the-job training
- good resources

WEAKNESSES

- weak initial assessment
- late assessment of key skills

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- more challenging targets in review and assessment processes
- better co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- more thorough internal verification
- greater ownership of portfolios by learners

33. Retention rates are consistently good. In the past two years, all advanced modern apprentices, 70 per cent of foundation modern apprentices and 69 per cent of NVQ learners stayed in learning for the full contract period.

34. Off-the-job training is effective. All learners have good training which is well matched to individual needs and closely related to the requirements of their employment and the NVQ. Most learners visit PSC's training centre one day each week for off-the-job training. Learners employed at some distance from the training centre are visited regularly by trainer/assessors who provide training in the workplace. All trainer/assessors have achieved or are working towards a teaching certificate and training is carried out in a professional manner. Training on PSC's premises is well planned and trainers use a variety of teaching methods which stimulate learners' interest and involve them effectively in lessons. Learning is followed up with assignments and

assessments which relate to NVQ and key skills units. Learners have the opportunity to evaluate training sessions at the training centre. Training offered by the subcontractor for lift truck training is exceptionally well planned and well taught. Trainers for lift truck training are appropriately qualified and attend regular updating of the latest industry standards. Assessment for lift truck basic training is well-managed and to national standards.

35. A wide variety of learning materials and equipment is available to all learners. This includes access to IT for the relevant level of key skills. Good learning materials are available such as well-prepared handouts and assignments which encourage study at home and sufficient computers for individual work. Learners also have a good range of sector-specific learning materials at their employer's premises. Lift truck training is particularly well resourced and good use is made of the subcontractors' trainers to update learners on the equipment used at work. All trainer/assessors have relevant occupational experience and hold, or are working towards, assessor qualifications. There is good individual support for learners during off-the-job training sessions. All staff have attended training in the latest developments in teaching key skills and all new trainer/assessors have development plans which includes key skills training. New arrangements are being piloted to improve learners' progress reviews, but it is too early to judge their impact.

36. Initial assessment is weak and inconsistent. There is no systematic initial assessment of basic skills, key skills and job skills. Some learners are given a basic skills test and initial key skills test if their school grades are below standard. The results are entered onto individual learning plans, but no reference is made to them again. Learners are not always given feedback on the results of their initial assessment. A training and development checklist is available in learners' files, but it is not copied for the learner. The checklist does not reflect the full NVQ or the modern apprenticeship requirements. Key skills exemptions are not always recorded accurately on the checklist and once it is complete, the checklist is not used to negotiate future actions. It is not used as a basis for the learning plan. Learning plans are updated after progress reviews, but they are not fully understood by learners.

37. The assessment of assignments and key skills units is carried out late. Assignments have been developed to help learners' progress with key skills, and reference to key skills development is regularly made during training. Assessment and feedback of key skills is often left until the end of a learners' programme and feedback is not always given quickly enough for learners to improve their understanding. Internal verification has not identified the weakness of late key skills assessment. Internal verification is mostly carried out at the end of training programmes. Most learners do not understand the role of the internal verifier. There is insufficient observation of assessors. Learners' assessment plans are identical and assessment and evidence referencing is mainly carried out by the assessor. Little emphasis is placed on evidence generated by the learners and they do not understand the NVQ criteria or collect evidence for their portfolios. Targets set during assessment planning are insufficiently clear to help learners understand their action plans.

38. Progress reviews are satisfactory and include health and safety and equality of opportunity. Learners have the opportunity to contribute and make comments during the review. Employers are encouraged to join the review process, but do not always take part. Trainer/assessors carry out the reviews and offer learners' support and advice when necessary. Learners' achievements and details of what the learner is doing at work are recorded, but targets and action plans are insufficiently clear and challenging for learners to progress quickly. There is insufficient emphasis on how the off-the-job training helps learners at work. Employers do not know what learners are taught during off-the-job training and this limits opportunities to co-ordinate the on- and off-the-job training and to reinforce learning in the workplace.