

INSPECTION REPORT

Protocol Consultancy Services

25 March 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 and Jobcentre Plus programmes. 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
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training 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.

Overall judgement

In those cases where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

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

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

SUMMARY

The provider

Protocol Consultancy Services is a company based in Tamworth that provides work-based learning for young people in business administration, management, customer service and travel services. There are currently 138 learners, of whom 87 are foundation modern apprentices, 45 are advanced modern apprentices and six are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) only.

Overall judgement

The quality of the provision is adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. Training in customer service, travel services and business administration and management is good. The leadership and management is good and the quality assurance arrangements are good. The management of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

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

Business administration, management & professional	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

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

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	2
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	2

KEY STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates
- high level of support for learners
- good practical assessment
- good use of individual learning plans
- good off-the-job training
- good internal communications
- effective staff review and appraisal
- effective business planning
- high levels of understanding of equality by learners and employers
- effective use of feedback from learners and employers

KEY WEAKNESSES

- poor assessment planning for some learners
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job learning for some learners
- inappropriate level of framework for some learners
- insufficient collection and use of management information
- insufficient setting of targets for widening participation

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of assessment opportunities in the workplace
- better quality copies of some materials for learners
- better recording of completed actions in some minutes of meetings

THE INSPECTION

1. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at Protocol Consultancy Services (Protocol) in March 2003. Inspectors visited 12 work placements and interviewed 19 employers or workplace supervisors. Inspectors also conducted 21 interviews with Protocol's staff and 45 with learners. They observed and graded three learning sessions. A range of documents was examined, including 40 portfolios of evidence, 35 individual learning plans, assessment records, external verifiers' reports, minutes of meetings and the company's strategic plans, policies and procedures. Protocol has produced three self-assessment reports. The most recent was produced in October 2002 and was updated in February 2003 in preparation for the inspection.

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	3

THE PROVIDER AS A WHOLE

Context

2. Protocol is a trading arm of Transworld Publications Services Limited. The managing director is the sole owner of the organisation. Protocol has been involved in training since 1993, primarily for the travel industry. It now offers training in travel services, customer service, business administration and management. It is based in Tamworth in Staffordshire. Protocol employs seven full-time and three part-time staff. There are 137 learners, of whom 86 are foundation modern apprentices, 45 are advanced modern apprentices and six are on other training programmes. Up until 2003, most off-the-job training took place in a suite of office accommodation in Birmingham. It is now provided mainly in a new training suite in the same location. The new accommodation comprises two training rooms. Protocol currently contracts with Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the Black Country LSC and Coventry and Warwickshire LSC. Protocol staff carry out off-the-job training and Protocol and employers provide on-the-job training. Most learners are employed in either travel companies or travel call centres. Learners are mainly from the Birmingham area, but some come from the wider West Midlands, including Tamworth, Coventry, Studley and Stratford.

3. In May 2002, the unemployment rate was 5.4 per cent in Birmingham, 3.6 per cent in Coventry and 1.8 per cent in Warwickshire, compared with the national average of 3 per cent. In 2001, the proportion of school leavers achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above was 41 per cent in Birmingham, 43 per cent in Coventry and 51 per cent in Warwickshire, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent. At the time of the 1991 census, the proportion of people from minority ethnic groups was 21.5 per cent in Birmingham, and 11.9 per cent in Coventry, compared with the national average of 6.2 per cent. The travel industry was affected following the events of 11 September 2001, and some learners transferred to customer service or business administration programmes so that they could continue learning during the business downturn. Manufacturing, especially in the automotive trade, remains a key industry for the local area. Tourism, particularly business tourism, continues to be a growth area.

Work-based learning for young people

4. Work-based learning in travel services, customer service, business administration and management is good. Over the past three years, retention rates have been high in all areas. Achievement rates are good in customer service and travel services. Learners' achievement in business administration and management is satisfactory. However, for some learners, achievement and progress are slow. Measures have been put in place to remedy this and there has been recent improvement. Tutors, assessors and employers provide learners with good support in their studies. The quality of teaching and learning is good, as are assessment practices, although assessment plans are not always carried out in full for some learners. Some assessment plans include targets that are insufficiently challenging.

5. The arrangements and conduct of internal verification are satisfactory. The monitoring of learners' progress is good. Protocol provides a wide range of relevant additional vocational qualifications that enhance the training programmes of management learners. The arrangements for assessing learners' literacy, numeracy and language skills on entering the programme are satisfactory.

6. Good progress reviews are carried out for all learners, although some learners who are training in travel services begin training at an inappropriate level of the framework. On-the-job training provided by some employers is not fully co-ordinated for learners in business and management.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

7. Protocol is run by two directors, one of whom is the managing director and founder of the company. The managing director has overall responsibility for managing the LSC contracts, strategic planning and organisational development. Marketing, the day-to-day quality of training, internal verification and assessment are the responsibility of the other director. There are three other full-time training advisers and two full-time administrators, one of whom is an administration manager. There is also one part-time administrator. A further two people are employed to carry out internal verification as required. There is also a part-time accounts administrator and an information and communications technology (ICT) consultant. The managing director manages all staff with regular reporting procedures that are delegated through an internal management structure. A wide range of policies and procedures is in place to manage the quality of training and support arrangements. There are procedures for the management and operation of business and strategic planning, quality assurance and equality of opportunity. Protocol has produced three self-assessment reports. The most recent one was produced in October 2002 and was updated just before the inspection in February 2003.

STRENGTHS

- good internal communications
- effective business planning
- open and consultative management
- good staff review and appraisal
- high levels of understanding of equality of opportunity by learners and employers
- effective additional training on equal opportunities for learners
- comprehensive quality assurance policies and procedures

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient collection and use of management information
- insufficient setting of targets for widening participation

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better recording of completed actions in some minutes of meetings
- better promotion and celebration of diversity

8. Internal communications are good, a strength not identified in the self-assessment report. Regular staff meetings take place, usually weekly, at which each member of staff reports on their activities for the week and the progress they have made towards

completing any actions that they are responsible for. Staff receive frequent updates on business matters, such as developments and changes to procedures. Information is openly shared with staff. Business information, including financial reports, is shared effectively with staff. Training issues are discussed at meetings and the process is well planned and managed. The staff have a good knowledge of roles and responsibilities, as well as a clear understanding of lines of reporting. Informal communication takes place at all levels, and there is a culture of open communication and team working. Minutes of meetings are recorded satisfactorily. Some completed actions are not always made clear in the minutes of the weekly meetings.

9. Business planning is good, a strength that was partly identified in the self-assessment report. There is a detailed current business plan, a three-year plan and an outline five-year plan. The plans are clearly linked to key business processes, and actions are regularly monitored against targets. Objectives are revised annually and updated quarterly. All staff take part in the quarterly review and contribute to setting targets. The business plan is linked well to other business processes, such as the quality assurance arrangements and teaching and learning processes. The staff have a good knowledge of the company's objectives and the methods used to achieve them. Staff are encouraged to make direct links between the business plan and their own personal development and action plans.

10. There is an open and consultative management style. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. All staff are actively encouraged by the managing director to contribute to the business decision-making processes. For example, even the newest members of the staff team are encouraged to attend management meetings, and good use is made of their contributions. Managers listen to the views of the staff and respond to suggestions for improvement. Many suggestions are implemented by the managers. There are good examples of team working and effective use of team skills, such as learning from each other through work shadowing. Staff are rewarded for making good suggestions that are adopted by the company.

11. The staff review and appraisal process is good. This strength was partly identified in the self-assessment report. New staff receive a thorough induction to their job roles. Induction plans are detailed and show clearly scheduled training in relevant aspects of the job over a number of weeks. In-house training and work shadowing are used well to provide first-hand experience. Staff are given good support and are encouraged to take part in internal and external training, including that leading to additional qualifications. Staff's development plans are clear and detailed. Individual development needs are given a high priority, while also ensuring that training complements the overall objectives of the business plan. Feedback to staff on their performance is well managed and occurs every two months. Annual appraisals take place and additional reviews are conducted mid-year. Staff have individual targets, linked to the company business objectives and are measured against them during the bi-monthly reviews. There is good recording of staff development activities and staff produce feedback and evaluations on any training they have.

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12. The managing director is responsible for managing financial resources and updating the annual budget forecast. Reviews of finance and financial statements are discussed by the directors and representatives of Protocol's bank at least quarterly. There are additional financial controls, including support services and financial health monitoring supplied by a major bank.

13. The provision of teaching and support for basic skills is satisfactory. There is a clear policy on the initial assessment of learners' literacy, language and numeracy skills. The support available to learners is clearly explained to them at induction and they remain aware of the support that is on offer. Diagnostic testing is followed by appropriate support being arranged. Support given is described in individual learning plans. All staff who are involved in teaching and assessment have been trained in basic skills support and diagnostic testing. Supplementary staff are used on a consultancy basis to provide additional support for learners where needed. At the time of the inspection, there were no learners with additional learning or social needs, although a few learners were receiving specialist support for particular difficulties, such as dyslexia. There are arrangements for learners who need English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) support, but these arrangements have not yet been used.

14. The collection and use of management information is insufficient. This was partly identified in the self-assessment report. Reports are produced to show an analysis of trends in performance over time, but these do not bring together all of the information from the LSCs. Individual members of staff have the responsibility of ensuring that agreed targets are met, but targets are set independently for each LSC area. Overall targets are set for improvements in retention and achievement rates, and these are frequently monitored. Managers are not always able to monitor Protocol's overall performance in each area of learning or examine trends across the whole organisation. Data on learners for previous years are collected by the contract year, not by the teaching year. During the inspection, Protocol had many difficulties in producing data in the format that inspectors required. In some cases, further analysis by inspectors was needed to ensure the reliability of the data.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

15. There is good understanding of equal opportunities by all learners and employers. This was partly identified in the self-assessment report. Equality of opportunity is managed satisfactorily. Learners receive a pack containing details of the equal opportunities policy at induction. A well-written questionnaire is used to check their understanding and to identify gaps in knowledge. Learners speak confidently about the complaints and grievance systems and show a clear understanding of the procedures. All employers and workplace mentors have a good understanding of Protocol's equal opportunities procedures and policies. Workplace mentors are informed of the equal opportunities policies and procedures at induction and these are reinforced throughout the programme. Learners' progress reviews contain a section on equal opportunities in which learners participate. Staff are regularly updated on equal opportunities issues, which is a standing agenda item at all staff meetings. Access for learners with restricted mobility is satisfactory.

16. There are good additional equal opportunities training sessions for learners. The high priority of equal opportunities training was identified as a strength in the self-assessment report. The additional sessions take place throughout the programme. Sessions are evaluated and there is a review questionnaire at the end to check that learners understand the issues. These sessions effectively reinforce learners' understanding and help them to apply the principles of equality of opportunity in the workplace. Learners and workplace mentors work through a CD-ROM computer package that explains up-to-date legislation and terminology.

17. There are insufficient targets to attract learners from under-represented groups. Data are collected and analysed for each LSC on ethnicity, gender and disability. However, these data are not analysed by area of learning and they are not used to target the recruitment of under-represented groups in specific vocational areas. Minority ethnic groups are under-represented in learning in relation to the local population in one LSC area, and the number of male learners is low. The equal opportunities development plan identifies this as an area for action but this has not been fully dealt with. The marketing leaflet mentions the equal opportunities statement and contains some positive images of members of under-represented groups, including men and learners from minority ethnic groups. However, there is little promotion of the provider to minority groups. Last year Protocol targeted male-only schools as part of its recruitment campaign. A link has recently been made with a local community group to help increase the ethnic diversity of the learner profile, but it is too early to judge its effect. The equal opportunities policy includes details of current legislation and policies on harassment, bullying and complaints. There is a detailed explanation of how to pursue a grievance and a complaint. However, there is no mention of celebrating diversity or of allowing learners time to attend religious festivals.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 2

18. Protocol has a strong focus on continuous improvement. Feedback is collected and analysed throughout the programme and from all training sessions. There is good use of feedback from learners who are taking additional qualifications. Feedback is also collected from employers. Questionnaires are given to learners at the end of each off-the-job training session, midway through the programme and after they finish their programme. Learners are asked for their views following induction, after key skills sessions and at the end of the course. There are regular focus group meetings, where learners and mentors are asked for feedback on the programmes. A recent analysis of focus group feedback identified 23 suggested improvements. All of these have been implemented except one. Changes made as a result of this include the use of headsets for observations, the introduction of one-hour training sessions as part of portfolio-building sessions and improvements to the induction arrangements. Learner reviews contain a place for learners to comment on their programmes. This is fed back to assessors. Evaluation of the weekly staff meetings is carried out on a regular basis.

19. The managing director is responsible for quality assurance at Protocol. The organisation won a regional quality award for small businesses in 2002. There are comprehensive and effective quality assurance policies and procedures for all elements of the training programme. These include marketing, accreditation of prior learning, initial assessment and customer complaints. Procedures are in some cases very detailed. For example, the procedure for accreditation of prior learning includes a map of each occupational area, and indicates how existing qualifications can be used to identify the point at which a learner enters the programme. The procedures for assessment include updating employers following initial assessment and ensuring that individual learning plans are updated. All staff have a copy of the procedures, which they understand and use well.

20. Comprehensive internal audits are carried out regularly and these are designed to check compliance with LSC requirements. Data are produced for each LSC and used at staff meetings to monitor the effectiveness of actions to improve learners' progress and achievement rates. Assessment systems are checked weekly by the director responsible for ensuring that the procedures are observed.

21. Internal verification arrangements are satisfactory. There are clear verification plans for each occupational area. Detailed records are kept of any identified training needs of assessors. Observation reports are well documented and contain supportive comments from verifiers. There are regular assessment standardisation meetings. When verifiers carry out interim assessments, they must talk to learners and check their understanding of their progress. There are monitoring files that clearly show which completed units have been verified.

22. All staff are involved in the self-assessment process, which has been carried out regularly since 1998. The most recent self-assessment report accurately reflected the grades given by inspectors. Key strengths and weaknesses were partially accurate for

leadership and management. The self-assessment report did not identify a number of strengths and weaknesses in the areas of learning.

Good Practice

Staff are rewarded for making good suggestions to improve the business. At the end of every three-month period, staff suggestions are analysed and discussed by the team. A small financial reward is given to members of staff whose suggestions are accepted. In the past two years, over 90 per cent of staff suggestions have been implemented.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration, management & professional

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	40	2

23. Protocol provides work-based learning programmes in business administration and management. Many learners have already completed parts of their modern apprenticeships while working towards modern apprenticeships in travel services, customer service or business administration. There are 21 foundation modern apprentices in business administration and 15 advanced modern apprentices in management or team leading. Four management learners are working towards NVQs at level 3 only. Where required, key skills are taught at the same time. All learners are employed. They are recruited from their employers and can join the programme at any time. Learners are employed mostly by independent travel agents, travel call centres and business travel companies in Birmingham, the Black Country, Coventry and Warwickshire. Three members of staff are involved in training and assessing learners. Protocol staff visit learners in their workplaces to carry out assessments, review their progress and provide guidance and support. In addition, most learners receive off-the-job training one day a month at Protocol's offices in Birmingham.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		11		11		1		5							
Retained*	2		11	100	5	45	1	100	5	100						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	3	27	1	100	5	100						
Still in learning	2		11	100	2	18	0	0	0	0						

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01											
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	8		18		7											
Retained*	7		18	100	7	100										
Successfully completed	0		2	11	5	71										
Still in learning	7		14	78	0	0										

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02															
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9															
Retained*	4															
Successfully completed	2															
Still in learning	4															

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good off-the-job training
- effective planning of training and assessment
- good assessment practice
- high level of learner support
- wide range of additional qualifications for learners in management

WEAKNESSES

- slow progress towards achievement by some learners
- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training for some learners
- undemanding target-setting for some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better use of assessment opportunities in the workplace
- better recording of learning from workshop material in portfolios

24. Learners receive good off-the-job training. Tutors are skilled in designing and planning effective training sessions. Learners are fully involved in the training sessions. The tutors use varied teaching methods and activities to promote learning. As noted in the self-assessment report, tutors summarise what has been learned well at key stages of the lesson, and they relate learning effectively to learners' qualifications. Learning sessions are at an appropriate level for learners and their qualifications. Tutors establish a good rapport with their learners. For learners who miss sessions, tutors provide individual tuition to help them catch up. Off-the-job training takes place in good, well-equipped premises. There is a recently introduced facility for computer training which is not yet fully in use. The computer equipment is of a very good standard. Protocol uses a range of up-to-date software that is equivalent to or better than that used by learners in their workplaces.

25. There is effective planning of training and assessment. When learners join a programme with Protocol, they receive a thorough initial assessment of their vocational and key skills. Learners who have already completed qualifications are exempt from some of the requirements of the framework, particularly in key skills. Individual learning plans record target dates for completion of each unit of the NVQ and key skills. Dates are amended if learners are unable to achieve the units by the original target date. Induction processes are satisfactory. Learners and their employers receive a schedule of dates for off-the-job training sessions, and they are able to plan attendance at the sessions well in advance. Learners can choose the dates on which they attend sessions. Learners use some of the training session materials as evidence in their portfolios. They receive handouts and question and answer sheets that provide the background knowledge needed for their learning programmes, but they do not always record this knowledge accurately.

26. There are satisfactory support arrangements for learners with numeracy and literacy needs. Individual tuition is provided to learners who are identified as needing this support following adequate initial assessment and diagnostic testing. Support is provided either in individual training sessions or by an additional teacher joining the group. Literacy and numeracy needs are also checked and identified during the programme at key points, such as following internal verification. Appropriate action is taken to deal with needs that are discovered at these later stages.

27. There are good assessment arrangements. Assessors agree short-term assessment plans to enable learners to complete their work by the next visit. The plan also shows what assessment methods will be used so that learners can prepare. Assessors visit learners in the workplace to observe them at work and assess their competence.

Assessors also use visits to help learners provide evidence for their qualifications. Assessors make good and accurate records of learners' work and competence in both occupational and key skills. Internal verification is thorough. Assessors discuss any identified training needs with the workplace mentor. Learners' portfolios are well organised and they contain a wide range of evidence. Portfolios include records of effective interim and final verification.

28. Learners receive very good support from Protocol staff. All learners attend an induction at the beginning of their programmes. They have a good understanding of their frameworks. Staff respond promptly to queries from learners by telephone both during and outside normal business hours. Learners have telephone numbers for their assessors and other Protocol staff. Learners appreciate this ease of access to staff and enjoy a very good rapport with their tutors and assessors. Protocol staff provide additional portfolio-building days away from the learners' workplaces. This enables learners to catch up on their NVQ and key skills work. Some learners work in the same building as Protocol's training rooms, and these learners value the frequent and informal face-to-face support that is available. Learners' progress is reviewed effectively and through thorough discussions. Learners are encouraged to report any difficulties they have encountered since the previous review. Health and safety and equal opportunities problems are fully discussed. Employers are encouraged to appoint workplace mentors to provide support for the learners in the workplace. Mentors receive a comprehensive handbook setting out their role and responsibilities.

29. A wide range of additional qualifications is available to learners in management. Learners who choose to progress to a management qualification can begin with an NVQ at level 2 in team leading or an NVQ at level 3 in management. They can also choose to complete an introductory certificate. Some learners also pursue assessor qualifications to support them in their workplace mentor role.

30. For some learners, progress towards achieving their qualifications is slow. Some learners on advanced modern apprenticeship programmes have not yet achieved after more than two years. Other learners have needed more time than was originally planned, sometimes because of changes in their jobs. In one case, a learner has not yet completed the first unit of the qualification after one year. At the time of the inspection, four learners had completed their advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks and were awaiting certification. Target dates for achievement in learners' individual learning plans are frequently missed and amended. However, retention rates are good and between 1998 and 2000, retention rates were 100 per cent. Of the 11 learners who started the advanced modern apprenticeship programme in 2002, all of them are still in learning.

31. For some learners, employers do not always plan their on-the-job training properly. In some cases, the training is unstructured and does not feature in learners' individual learning plans. Protocol staff speak to employers frequently, but they do not always develop effective plans for training in the workplace. Some employers provide both on- and off-the-job training. Protocol staff record this during progress reviews and in

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learners' development logs which are held in their portfolios. Assessors do not use all of the information gathered in learners' development records in assessments. Some learners have too few opportunities to demonstrate their competence in their day-to-day work. The self-assessment report did not fully evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the provision in business administration.

32. Targets set for some learners are undemanding. Long-term targets for completing NVQ units are set out in individual learning plans. Assessors agree short-term targets with learners at each monthly assessment visit. Most learners find that the targets in their individual learning plan do not challenge them sufficiently in the amount of work to be completed before the next assessment visit. Assessors do not always identify those learners who are able to progress more quickly or who would prefer to work at a faster pace. For example, many learners have achieved higher-level qualifications in previous studies.

Good Practice

In response to learners' comments from focus groups, Protocol staff hold additional off-the-job training sessions for learners to work on their portfolios. Learners are given dates and times, and their employers agree when they should attend. Protocol staff are present at the sessions to help learners work on their NVQ and key skills evidence.

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	64	2

33. Protocol has 64 learners in retailing, customer service and transportation learning programmes. All the learners are employed. There are 24 learners on an advanced modern apprenticeship in customer service, 38 following a foundation modern apprenticeship and two learners working towards NVQs at level 2 only. Key skills are part of the training programme. Learners are mainly recruited directly from employment. Initial assessment and progress reviews are carried out by the assessors. Assessment of the learners is carried out in the workplace and learners are usually visited every four to six weeks. Employers provide on-the-job training. Off-the-job training is provided by Protocol in its training suite in central Birmingham. Most learners attend off-the-job training once a month.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	5		20		4		2									
Retained*	5		20	100	4	100	2	100								
Successfully completed	0		1	5	4	100	2	100								
Still in learning	5		19	95	0	0	0	100								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	16		24		5		2									
Retained*	16		24	100	5	100	2	100								
Successfully completed	0		2	8	5	100	2	100								
Still in learning	16		22	92	0	0	0	100								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
NVQ Training																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		5		1		1									
Retained*	2		5	100	1	100	1	100								
Successfully completed	0		5	100	1	100	1	100								
Still in learning	2		0	100	0	0	0	100								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates
- high level of support for learners
- good use of individual learning plans
- comprehensive and effective induction
- good reviews of learners' progress

WEAKNESSES

- insufficient assessment for some learners
- delayed training in key skills for some learners
- slow progress by some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- better quality copies of some materials for learners

34. The achievement and retention rates for learners on foundation and advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks are good. All learners successfully completed their full framework in 1999-2000 and 2000-01. In the current teaching year, over 90 per cent of learners who started their apprenticeship are still in learning.

35. There is a high level of support for learners. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report. A large proportion of learners are employed by one employer in Birmingham city centre. Learners working in this location have good access to their assessors. Learners find this very helpful and they hold their assessors in high regard.

However, learners who are working outside the city centre do not benefit from such close assessor contact. Assessors are accessible by telephone and e-mail by learners. There are good, monthly off-the-job training workshops. Training sessions are well planned and prepared. Workbooks for learners, completed during the workshop, are well written and are of a good standard. The workshops are scheduled into individual learning plans. Employers are committed to helping learners succeed and co-operate well in arranging for learners to attend off-the-job training. Learners can also participate in portfolio-building days on an optional basis. Each learner has a workplace mentor to guide them in the completion of their qualification. The standard of work by mentors is good. Many of the mentors have already completed framework awards in customer service with Protocol. Protocol runs regular update meetings for mentors to keep them up to date and share best practice. However, mentors who are unable to attend these meetings do not always receive a written update.

36. Good use is made of learners' individual learning plans. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report. Individual learning plans are regularly updated and reviewed. NVQ unit completion targets are appropriately staggered throughout the term of the apprenticeship. There is good use of the initial assessment interview to tailor individual learning plans to each learner's needs and to match learners to the most suitable programme. Learners have a clear understanding of their own learning plan and good awareness of their progress. There is good progression to awards at higher levels. Employers agree any proposed changes to the learners' target dates. If necessary, additional support is provided by employers to help learners complete their framework.

37. Protocol's staff are well qualified and have a good range of appropriate qualifications and recent work-based experience. Facilities for off-the-job training are very well resourced. There is a well-equipped training room and very good computer facilities. Some of the photocopied materials used in learners' portfolios are poorly copied and difficult to read.

38. The induction of learners is comprehensive and effective. Learners enjoy an informative one-day induction workshop. There is a clear outline of what is expected of them and what support they can expect to receive from Protocol's staff and their employer. Learners receive a good introduction to health and safety and equality of opportunity. Thorough training is given in equal opportunities and learners complete an equal opportunities questionnaire. This is retained by the learners in their portfolios and is referred to at each progress review. Portfolios are well laid out and evidence is clearly referenced.

39. The arrangements for numeracy and literacy support are satisfactory. Individual tuition is provided to learners following detailed initial assessment and diagnostic testing. Support is provided through individual training sessions or by an additional teacher joining the group. This enables those learners who are experiencing difficulty to receive individual support in the training session. Additional support is provided sensitively, and is linked to training in key skills. Specialist additional staff are used to help with specific needs, such as dyslexia.

40. There are good, comprehensive reviews of learners' progress, which are well planned and carried out regularly. Learners receive clear guidance on how to collect evidence. An assessment review form is used effectively by learners to monitor their progress as they complete the agreed activities. Additional reviews are used where needed to monitor learners' progress. There is good testing of learners' understanding of their progress. Reviews also examine how identified additional learning needs are being met. There is good promotion of equality of opportunity and learners are asked to provide practical examples of equal opportunity in their workplaces. Careers advice is incorporated into the review when required. Internal verification is satisfactory. It is planned on a quarterly basis and all learners' portfolios are subject to internal verification three times during the course of the framework completion. Assessors are observed regularly by an internal verifier. The internal verifier interviews the learners.

41. Assessment plans are not fully met for all learners. Some learners have not received an assessment visit for more than two months. In some cases, employers ask assessors to defer visits, owing to seasonal fluctuations in business. Telephone contact by the assessor to check on progress is not always sufficient in these circumstances. Learners who are not based in Birmingham city centre have less direct access to their assessors. For some learners, assessment and progress reviews have taken place at the same meeting. In a few cases, learners are disadvantaged when they are not able to attend the portfolio-building days where aspects of the assessment of evidence are discussed. The candidate assessment record is prescriptive, although recently this has changed to enable learners to collect a range of assessment evidence through their everyday work. In most cases assessment reviews set clear short-term targets.

42. The teaching of key skills is delayed for some learners and training was given towards the end of their programmes. In some cases, learners were unable to provide the certificates to give evidence of their previous achievements in key skills. This led to a delay in starting that part of their qualification. Recently Protocol has put in place clearer guidance and timescales for learners to provide certificates in support of their claim for prior achievement in key skills.

43. Some learners make slow progress towards the achievement of their qualification. Completion of the first unit has taken over six months for some learners. This is also reflected in the achievement rates, with two learners who began their foundation modern apprenticeship in 1999-2000 taking two years to complete.

Hospitality, sport, leisure & travel

Grade 2

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	33	2

44. Protocol has 33 modern apprentices in hospitality, sport, leisure and travel. Of these, 27 are working towards the foundation modern apprenticeship and six towards the advanced modern apprenticeship. All learners are employed in call centres, or in retail or business travel companies. Most learners enrol on the travel services foundation modern apprenticeship, and progress to the customer service foundation modern apprenticeship and thereafter to the advanced frameworks for both these occupational areas. The teaching of key skills is part of the training. Learners attend off-the-job training and portfolio-building sessions. Off-the-job training takes place once a month for most learners. All learners are recruited by their employers. Each learner has a mentor to support them at work and manage their on-the-job training. Three staff members are involved in training and assessing learners. All assessment by observation takes place at work by one of the team of Protocol assessors, with additional assessment during the monthly off-the-job training sessions. Most learners are visited monthly for assessment in the workplace and progress reviews take place every 10 to 12 weeks. Internal verification takes place during and at the end of each learner's qualification. All assessors and internal verifiers are appropriately qualified and experienced.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

Work-based learning for young people																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		22		26		6		12							
Retained*	2		19	86	25	96	6	100	12	100						
Successfully completed	0		15	68	25	96	6	100	12	100						
Still in learning	2		4	18	0	0	0	0	0	0						

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Work-based learning for young people																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	9		43		22		4									
Retained*	8		41	95	22	100	4	100								
Successfully completed	0		22	51	22	100	4	100								
Still in learning	8		19	44	0	0	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

STRENGTHS

- good retention and achievement rates
- good practical assessment
- high level of support for learners
- effective off-the-job training

WEAKNESSES

- inappropriate level of framework for some learners

OTHER IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- clearer photocopying of record sheets for learners
- better guidance to learners on the quality of portfolio presentation
- more detailed recording of knowledge and understanding

45. Achievement and retention rates are good. Between 1998 and 2001, 43 out of 44 learners who started their advanced modern apprenticeships successfully completed. Between 1999 and 2001, all 26 learners successfully completed their foundation modern apprenticeships. In 2001-02, 15 out of the 22 learners who started completed their advanced modern apprenticeship frameworks within the year. Four of these learners are still in learning.

46. Learners benefit from good practical assessment. They receive an initial briefing and are fully involved in the assessment process. They participate in matching their evidence to the standards and take part in agreeing short- and longer-term action-

planning. Learners have a good understanding of what is expected of them. A range of assessment methods is used. Assessors suit their methods to the working environment and the individual needs of learners. Assessment is modified in quieter periods, and to fit in with shift patterns. In addition to observation, there is good use of other methods, such as question and answer sessions, professional discussion and learners' statements. Portfolios are well organised and use standardised paperwork. Key skills are assessed alongside the NVQ in most cases, although many learners have already achieved key skills before joining the programme. Learners and assessors work well together to identify and use every opportunity towards unit achievement. There is good cross-referencing between units. Internal verification processes are effectively planned and take place throughout the programme. There is an informal system to support learners with additional learning needs. Employers are involved in target-setting and fully understand their role in confirming realistic timescales. In most cases, learners' individual learning plans are updated and amended to reflect any changes to targets, achievements, visits and progress reviews.

47. Protocol staff and employers both provide a high level of support for learners. Many workplace mentors are highly qualified and possess NVQs and qualifications in management. Where employers carry out ongoing assessment of their learners' competence on the job, their findings are shared with the Protocol assessors. Workplace mentors receive good training and a comprehensive handbook. Mentors have a good understanding of the assessment process and assist learners with portfolio construction and evidence gathering. They encourage learners when targets set for achievement are slipping. Self-study time is allocated when business is quiet. Employers are involved in the progress review process. They agree the targets set and discuss careers issues. Assessors are accessible between assessment visits, offering help and advice on demand to both learners and employers. Learners enjoy a good working relationship with assessors and are pleased with the way the programme is organised. The employers are also satisfied with the programme. At induction, learners are initially assessed for their key skills and vocational ability. Learners receive a satisfactory induction which includes a one-day off-the-job session and a one-day induction at work. Although it is not a mandatory part of the framework, most learners complete an ICT award.

48. There are adequate arrangements for supporting learners with numeracy and literacy. Individual tuition is provided for learners who have been identified as needing such support following initial assessment and thorough diagnostic testing. In some cases, specialist tutors are used. Most support is provided either in individual training sessions or by an additional teacher joining the group to work with specific learners. Additional support is provided sensitively. The additional needs of one learner, however, were not identified at the start of the training programme.

49. Focus meetings with learners enable them to feed back to Protocol on the effectiveness of the programme. Learners can also make suggestions for improvement at these meetings. Learner satisfaction is also checked when the internal verifier visits the learners midway through their programmes.

50. Learners benefit from monthly off-the-job training sessions. These sessions concentrate on the background knowledge required for each unit of the NVQ, together with the opportunity for assessment and portfolio-building. Sessions are well planned and evaluated. Learners find the sessions enjoyable and stimulating and they appreciate being given time to keep their portfolios up to date and to meet target dates. The training room and computer suite in Protocol's Birmingham office offer good-quality visual and audio teaching and learning equipment. The background knowledge training component of the NVQ is covered in a series of comprehensive workbooks and supplementary question sheets. A clearer system for accurately and fully recording learners' competence in background knowledge is needed.

51. Most learners begin their training programme as foundation modern apprentices. They are put through an initial assessment test, together with an initial assessment to match their current vocational skills with the units of the NVQ. Many learners hold qualifications such as national diplomas in travel and tourism, or certificates in retail operations, general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) or key skills units, sometimes at higher levels than the apprenticeship frameworks require. Well-qualified learners are sometimes placed on the foundation modern apprenticeship programme, without recognition of their prior learning and achievements. Protocol has put in place clearer guidance and timescales for learners to provide certificates in support of their claims for prior achievement in key skills.

52. Learners' portfolios contain a substantial quantity of photocopied material. Some of these photocopies are poor, making it difficult to read essential information. Protocol has introduced a system of grading learners' portfolios to encourage a high standard of presentation. Participation is optional and not enough guidance is given to learners on this initiative.