

INSPECTION REPORT

PSC Training and Development Ltd

10 June 2005



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

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 learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** 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.

Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

INSPECTION REPORT

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. PSC Training and Development Ltd (PSC), previously known as Plymouth Skills Centre, 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. It is funded by Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The total number of directly funded work-based learners is 205. One hundred and eighty-five are apprentices, 17 are advanced apprentices and three learners are working towards level 2 national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Eighty-nine learners have additional social or learning needs and many are referred by Connexions.

2. PSC has a board of three directors. The managing director leads a team of 44 staff. The company structure includes five other managers, 35 staff who are directly involved with training, assessment and support of learners, and three other support staff. Recruitment, selection, initial assessment and induction are the responsibility of a specific co-ordinator for each area of learning. Training and assessment are carried out either at PSC's training centre or in the workplace.

3. PSC subcontracts training and assessment for a few learners in specific sections of two areas of learning. Plymouth College of Further Education (the college) is contracted to manage training and assessment for three advanced apprentices in electrical installation. West Country Training is contracted to manage training and assessment in lift truck driving for six apprentices.

4. PSC works as a subcontractor for the college and a consortium of local secondary schools, the Tamar Valley Consortium. This subcontracted work involves LSC-funded provision for post-16 learners. The teaching and learning for these learners is integrated with PSC's mainstream work-based provision.

5. The college is the lead partner for the LSC's contract for Entry to Employment (E2E) provision in the Plymouth area. PSC is contracted to deliver the vocational skills and development strand to learners referred by Connexions or the lead partner. The E2E provision for 61 learners, is restricted to construction crafts and engineering.

6. PSC also works as a subcontractor to the college by providing vocational training for full-time college students. This training is delivered over one, two or three days a week depending on the level of the course. Foundation and national vocational qualification (NVQ) equivalent courses are delivered at PSC's training centre for 12 learners in construction crafts. Thirty-five learners who have a work placement, are working towards level 2 or level 3 NVQs in construction, or engineering or retailing, distribution and warehousing.

7. PSC delivers level 1 NVQs or their equivalent over two days a week for an academic year to each learner from the Tamar Valley Consortium. All training, for the 33 learners in construction and 19 learners in engineering, is carried out at PSC's training centre. Some learners have work placements which are arranged, monitored and managed by the

schools. No workplace evidence is required for the qualification which takes place at PSC. Learners are allocated a trainer to deal with learning needs and a co-ordinator to deal with pastoral needs while they are at PSC. All basic and key skills are delivered at school and are not the contracted responsibility of PSC. Learners who achieve their qualification are offered a work-based learning apprenticeship by PSC.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

8. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. PSC's leadership and management are good, as are the arrangements for equality of opportunity. Quality assurance is satisfactory. In construction, business administration, management and professional, and foundation programmes the provision is good. In engineering, technology and manufacturing, and retailing, customer service and transportation, the provision is satisfactory.

9. The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process. The views of staff, learners and employers are used in the self-assessment report. A self-assessment subgroup of staff, chaired by the quality manager, is responsible for managing the process. Analysis of data is well used in making judgements about retention and achievement rates and progression. The findings are well focused on the impact on the learner. The last annual report which was completed in July 2004, was subject to some modification by the subgroup in February 2005. The report is self-critical and identifies many of the strengths and several of the weaknesses identified by inspectors. The findings did not accurately represent many of the recent improvements, particularly in construction. The self-assessment process does not adequately include the work carried out by PSC as a subcontractor for other providers.

10. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements. PSC has a clear and effective commitment to continuous improvement. The action plan from the reinspection in August 2002, has been well implemented and most of the weaknesses have been resolved. Some previous weaknesses, such as weak assessment practices in engineering, are now strengths. In work-based learning, there is an upward trend in retention and achievement rates. The effective work done with school pupils from the Tamar Valley Consortium has increased the demand for places and has improved the achievement rates. The inspection grade profile has changed from satisfactory in 2002 to good in 2005.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PSC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT LTD:

- continue to improve retention and achievement rates and progression across the organisation
- better target-setting in progress reviews and learning plans
- better co-ordination of key skills development and assessment
- more rigorous monitoring of health and safety in engineering work placements
- continue to develop employers' understanding of NVQ and key skills requirements

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate

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

Construction			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Construction crafts			
Apprenticeships for young people	84	2	
Other government-funded provision	64	2	

Engineering, technology & manufacturing			3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Motor vehicle/cycle			
Apprenticeships for young people	42	3	
Other government-funded provision	19	3	
NVQ training for young people	3	3	
Mechanical engineering			
Apprenticeships for young people	15	3	
Other government-funded provision	5	3	

Business administration, management & professional			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Business administration			
Apprenticeships for young people	34	2	

Retailing, customer service & transportation		3
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Retailing</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
Other government-funded provision	3	3
<i>Customer service</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	10	3
<i>Warehousing and distribution</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	7	3
Other government-funded provision	8	3
<i>Lift-truck awards</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	6	3

Foundation programmes		2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability/employment training</i>		
Entry to Employment	61	2

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

11. All five areas of learning offered by PSC were reported on and graded. The inspection included the LSC-funded provision that is subcontracted to PSC by the college and the Tamar Valley Consortium. A one-day interim inspection visit by three inspectors took place in May. This visit involved inspection in construction, engineering and business administration. The remainder of the inspection took place over a four-day final visit.

Number of inspectors	7
Number of inspection days	29
Number of learners interviewed	87
Number of staff interviewed	27
Number of employers interviewed	32
Number of subcontractors interviewed	3
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	36
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	5
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

12. **Construction learners achieve a high standard of practical work** and demonstrate confidence and ability in the use of hand tools. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices are satisfactory and improving. The achievement rate for learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium has shown significant improvement during the past three years. Learners' portfolios are good.

13. **Learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium in engineering make good progression into work-based learning or further education.** Achievement rates increased to 84 per cent in 2004. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices are satisfactory and improving.

14. **Apprentices in business administration quickly develop good personal and practical skills in the workplace.** Supervisors value the contribution apprentices make and expand their job roles and responsibilities as they develop. Progression of apprentices into full-time employment is good as most continue with the employer who managed their training. Retention rates for apprentices were good at the previous inspection and have subsequently improved. Achievement rates are satisfactory and improving. A few of the learners recruited in 2002-03 have made slow progress.

15. **Retention and achievement rates for learners who are working towards lift truck awards are good and improving.** The achievement rate by learners from the local college is satisfactory. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices in warehousing and customer service are satisfactory and improving. Learners demonstrate satisfactory occupational skills and knowledge in the workplace. **Progress towards completion of units for some learners is slow. There is insufficient assessment by observation in the workplace for some learners.**

16. The proportion of E2E learners who progress into apprenticeships and/or employment is satisfactory at 55 per cent. Learners gain vocational qualifications during the programme. The standard of learners' practical work is good. All

learners have experience in a work placement. Attendance rates at the training centre and on placement are good at 93 per cent.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Business administration, management & professional	0	1	1	0	2
Construction	0	4	1	0	5
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	5	0	6
Foundation programmes	0	1	1	0	2
Retailing, customer service & transportation	0	2	0	0	2
Total	0	9	8	0	17

17. Teaching and learning in construction crafts are good. Trainers enliven sessions by referring to their industrial experiences and good use is made of practical artefacts to illustrate construction techniques. Learners receive a lot of individual guidance from the skilled trainers during practical workshop sessions. **Assessment in the workplace is good.** Assessors make frequent on-site visits to observe learners doing practical work and to question their understanding of the tasks. A lot of care is taken to find a good work placement for each learner. Most learners have an adequate range of learning experience in the workplace, but if gaps are identified, learners are temporarily transferred to another employer.

18. Engineering training sessions at PSC are well structured, with detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. The planned sessions involve frequent changes of activity for learners and good use is made of practical resources to reinforce learners' understanding. Resources for fabrication and welding at the training centre are good, with a wide selection of welding equipment and workshop machinery. Learners have access to equipment to carry out destructive and non-destructive testing on their completed welds to improve their understanding of weld composition and strengths. Assessment practices in the workplace are good. Assessors make frequent visits to observe learners' performance and to question their understanding on their work. Learners receive prompt feedback on their performance. Assessors work effectively with employers in planning workplace tasks for learners and in identifying opportunities for future assessment.

19. Off-the-job training for business administration learners is good. Lessons are well structured and include a variety of well-designed activities to engage learners' interest. Learners participate enthusiastically. Trainers are well qualified and experienced. The identification of work placements for learners is very carefully planned. Managers at the main employer work effectively with PSC's staff to arrange suitable placements. Learners receive a comprehensive induction to their learning programme. Initial induction by PSC's staff is supplemented by an extensive two-day workplace induction for those learners with the main employer.

20. Off-the-job training for learners working towards lift-truck and customer service awards is good. Lift truck trainers are well qualified and make effective use of a range of good training resources. Lift truck apprentices value the support they receive and enjoy their three-day training course with a local subcontractor. Customer service apprentices attend a well-structured training programme at PSC.

The training effectively develops their customer service skills and background knowledge. The trainer takes learners on visits to local shops to observe and evaluate standards of customer service. Learners receive good support from their supervisors in the workplace. Assessors make frequent visits to the workplace and offer effective support. Learners make good progress in the development of workplace skills and knowledge.

21. E2E learners receive very good learning support. Additional learning needs are systematically identified, support is well planned and learners' progress is routinely recorded. Good use is made of information and communications technology (ICT) resources to enhance learning. Learners work in the vocational area of their choice and have the opportunity to gain formal qualifications and work-placement experience. Work placements are well matched to the interests and needs of learners. Employers are very supportive and are committed to training young people. A high proportion of the learners who progressed into work-based apprenticeships and/or employment in 2003-04 are still on their chosen career path.

22. Construction employers have a poor understanding of what learners have to do to complete all aspects of the apprenticeship framework.

23. Workshop areas for construction crafts are small and provide insufficient space for larger-scale projects and storage of materials.

24. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is insufficient in engineering. Employers are unaware of training or topics being covered in the centre and PSC only collects information on training in the workplace retrospectively. Employers do not have sufficient understanding of the NVQ and key skills to co-ordinate the training in the workplace with the studies in the training centre.

25. Target-setting is weak in engineering and in business administration. Progress against previous targets is not sufficiently monitored and targets are often not clear. Workplace supervisors are not fully aware of review targets and cannot help in the collection of workplace evidence.

26. In retailing, customer service and transportation, the planning and recording of on-the-job training is insufficient. Training plans do not adequately identify individual needs and how training will be delivered. Progress reviews do not adequately monitor and record training that has been completed, nor do they effectively plan and target on-the-job training.

27. Recording of personal and social development of E2E learners is insufficient. The key objectives in individual learning plans focus on achievement of qualifications. There is insufficient emphasis on personal and social barriers. Learning plans are not adequately used as part of the progress review process.

Leadership and management

28. Business planning is good. Achievable targets are set for learner numbers, income, participation by under-represented groups, customer satisfaction, learner retention and achievement, and staff development. Monitoring arrangements are

clear. All staff have targets set at their appraisal which directly relate to the business plan. The company does not have a formal mission statement but its vision, aims and values are known and shared by staff.

29. Training is well managed. Work placements are carefully selected and matched to learners' aims. Training is well planned with opportunities for learners to join programmes at any time of the year. Learner support has improved with new staff and a well-equipped classroom with 13 computers. Systematic initial assessment is used to identify the learners who may benefit from additional learning and/or social support. Where additional learning needs are identified, learners take diagnostic tests. Many learners receive good literacy and numeracy support from specialist staff at PSC. Retention and achievement are improving. Analysis of data on most programmes is good. However, on the E2E programme it is insufficient to identify areas in need of improvement.

30. Links with partner organisations are particularly effective. PSC is an active member of the local training provider partnership. Links with schools are good. Many of the learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium progress onto modern apprenticeships. There are effective working relationships with employers. Employers have donated expensive equipment for use in PSC's engineering workshops. Employers facilitate access to specialist equipment and demonstrate in the workplace advanced techniques. PSC works well with the college and Connexions in providing training and support for E2E learners with a vocational aptitude in engineering or construction crafts. The teamwork in support of E2E learners is particularly effective. Staff teamwork is good within and across areas of learning.

31. Staff development is good. A comprehensive company learning plan is devised through the good appraisal process and business planning. Vocationally competent staff, who do not have training or teaching qualifications, work towards a teaching qualification as well as assessor awards. Staff training includes frequent opportunities for awareness raising on equality and diversity. New staff are mentored and supported very well.

32. Promotion of equality and diversity in PSC is good. There is a well-managed programme of activity to ensure that learners have a good awareness of equality. Many of the corridors and rooms in the PSC training centre display posters that remind readers of the company's stance on equality of opportunity and provide guidance on action to take if individuals feel harassed by others. Access to the ground-floor classrooms, workshops and toilets at PSC's training centre is good for those with restricted mobility.

33. PSC's staff are involved in a wide range of activity to promote training opportunities to under-represented groups. They work effectively with a local charity to promote training in construction trades to disengaged young people who live in areas of social deprivation in Plymouth. PSC provides 'taster' days as part of events aimed at promoting more women into construction and engineering. Links with the training provider network have enabled PSC's staff to also establish contact with local minority ethnic groups. PSC uses its association with the Tamar Valley Consortium to promote work-based learning to pupils in a variety of schools. PSC

specifically promotes its construction and engineering training to female E2E learners at the college.

34. Effective action has been taken to improve the quality of training provided.

Most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been resolved. Internal verification is much improved. Graded observations of teaching and learning, reviews and assessment are carried out at least twice a year. The quality of provision and implementation of the self-assessment development plan is closely monitored through a number of sub groups. Complaints are dealt with promptly. Formal feedback is collected from learners and employers twice a year and is carefully analysed to assess satisfaction levels. Action is taken to improve the provision after feedback.

35. Co-ordination of key skills training is inadequate. Employers do not have sufficient knowledge of key skills in construction to be able to help learners collect appropriate evidence. In engineering, there is insufficient evidence generated from the workplace for key skills. In business administration, there is insufficient monitoring of learners' progress in key skills. In retailing, customer service and warehousing, key skills are often not started until towards the end of a learner's programme.

36. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in work placements is insufficient.

Equality of opportunity is checked at each new placement concurrently with a health and safety audit. Employers are given an introductory pack of information and they are sent updates on legislation changes by PSC. However, there are insufficient checks to ensure that the policy, associated procedures and required changes are fully implemented in the workplace.

37. Quality improvement procedures are not adequately applied in a few areas.

Arrangements for monitoring PSC's subcontractors are insufficient. Target-setting is inadequate in most areas of learning. Action points shown in the minutes of meetings are not always followed up at the next meeting.

38. In a few engineering work placements, breaches of health and safety practice were observed.

PSC's staff carry out a comprehensive health and safety check of the premises of new employers. Further checks are made on a quarterly basis. However, in a few placements, learners were observed working unsafely or using appropriate personal protective equipment incorrectly.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good business planning
- good management of training
- particularly effective partnership working
- good staff development
- good promotion of equality of opportunity at PSC
- good range of activity to promote training to under-represented groups

- very effective action to improve quality of provision

Weaknesses

- inadequate co-ordination of key skills training
- incomplete application of quality improvement procedures in a few areas

Construction

Strengths

- high standard of practical work
- good teaching and learning
- well-planned programmes
- good assessment practice
- good work placements

Weaknesses

- incomplete knowledge of NVQs and key skills by employers
- small practical workshop areas

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good progression by learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium
- well-structured off-the-job training
- good assessment practice in the workplace
- effective working relationships with employers
- good training resources for fabrication and welding

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- weak target-setting
- insufficient key skills evidence from the workplace
- breaches of health and safety practice in a few work placements

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- good development of personal and practical skills
- good progression into employment
- good retention rates for apprentices
- well-planned and delivered off-the-job training
- very careful planning of work placements

- comprehensive induction programme

Weaknesses

- weak target-setting
- insufficient monitoring of key skills progress

Retailing, customer service & transportation

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates for lift truck learners
- good off-the-job training
- good workplace support

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards unit achievement for some learners
- insufficient planning and recording of on-the-job training

Foundation programmes

Strengths

- very good learning support
- well-planned programme to meet learners' needs
- very good matching of learners to employers
- good teamwork

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' personal and social development
- insufficient analysis of data to monitor programme performance

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PSC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT LTD:

- the friendly, accessible and supportive staff
- making new friends
- gaining confidence
- training at PSC that helps them at work
- how helpful staff are with problems at work
- the good support for reading and writing in the classroom
- the supply of personal protective equipment

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PSC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the refreshment facilities in the training centre
- the social areas in the training centre - there could be more
- the planning of break times
- the size of some teaching rooms
- the control of disruptive learners in some classes
- more visits to the workplace by assessors

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good business planning
- good management of training
- particularly effective partnership working
- good staff development
- good promotion of equality of opportunity at PSC
- good range of activity to promote training to under-represented groups
- very effective action to improve quality of provision

Weaknesses

- inadequate co-ordination of key skills training
- incomplete application of quality improvement procedures in a few areas

39. Business planning is good. The business plan for 2004-05 includes perceptive market and competitor analysis and is clearly related to the provider's capabilities. A strategy for the current year is derived from the broad five-year strategy. Achievable targets are set for learner numbers, income, participation by under-represented groups, customer satisfaction, learner retention and achievement and staff development. The financial implications of learner numbers in each month are detailed. Monitoring arrangements are clear. All staff have targets set at their appraisal which directly relate to the business plan. The plan is ratified by the board of directors. The company does not have a formal mission statement but its vision, aims and values are known and shared by staff.

40. Training is well managed. Following the previous inspection, constructive changes have been made to the management structure, and new staff have been appointed. These include a training manager, an examinations officer, a health and safety officer, two staff for skills for life, the government's initiative in training for literacy, numeracy and the use of language, and a number of new assessors and trainers. Work placements are carefully selected and matched to learners' needs. Training is well planned with opportunities for learners to join programmes at any time of the year. Learner support has improved with new staff and a well-equipped classroom with 13 computers. Systematic initial assessment is used to identify the learners who may benefit from additional learning and/or social support. When additional learning needs are identified, learners attend diagnostic tests. Many learners receive good literacy and numeracy support from specialist staff at PSC. Retention and achievement rates are improving. Analysis of data on most programmes is good and reports are produced in many formats from headline overviews to performance by individual assessors. Although performance is discussed by managers in detail, this is not evident from the minutes of the management meetings.

41. Links with partners are particularly effective. PSC is an active member of the local training provider partnership and has contributed and received valued guidance through this network. Links with schools are particularly good. PSC is a successful provider of

training for over 50, post-16 learners from schools in the Tamar Valley Consortium. Progression of these learners onto modern apprenticeships is good. Links with employers are good and the company responds very well to employers' needs, particularly with the main employer for business administration learners. PSC works very well with the college in providing E2E training to learners with a vocational aptitude. PSC also has a well-established partnership with the college in providing vocational training to full-time college students.

42. Staff development is good. A comprehensive company learning plan is devised from the training needs which are identified through the good appraisal process and business planning. This is effectively monitored by the staff development subgroup. All staff have a learning log to record their training activities. Vocationally competent staff who do not have a training or teaching qualification, take a teaching qualification as well as assessor awards. Other opportunities for training are good, especially through the provider network. New staff are very effectively mentored and supported and have a three-month appraisal in addition to the annual appraisal and six-monthly update for more experienced staff.

43. Co-ordination of key skills training is inadequate. There is no overall strategy for the delivery of key skills, although there is a procedure covering internal verification and online testing. Employers do not have sufficient knowledge of key skills in construction to be able to help learners collect appropriate evidence. Three learners in electrical installation, who are subcontracted to the college, have made very slow progress with their key skills. In engineering, there is insufficient evidence generated from the workplace for key skills, and in business administration there is insufficient monitoring of learners' progress towards key skills. In retailing, customer service and warehousing, key skills are often not started until near the end of a learners' programme.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

44. There is a comprehensive equal opportunities policy which is updated regularly to comply with current legislation. An effective equal opportunities committee, with appropriate representation of managers and staff representatives, meets on a quarterly basis. One staff member has the role of equal opportunities co-ordinator. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. During the first stage of induction, individual learners are given verbal and written guidance on their rights and responsibilities. Learners are introduced to PSC's policies on harassment, bullying and use of offensive language. This is supplemented by a half-day equal opportunities awareness course that is given to small groups of learners by the co-ordinator. Topics include current legislation, human rights and discrimination relating to gender, ethnicity and disability. Particular emphasis is given to identification of harassment and bullying and actions for individuals to take. At the end of the course, a short assessment is carried out and, if successful, learners are given a certificate. Many of the corridors and rooms in the PSC training centre display posters that remind readers of the company's stance on equality of opportunity, and provide guidance on action to take if they are harassed by others. Learners' understanding on equality of opportunity is checked again through a range of questionnaires. If learners are identified as not having adequate understanding, they are invited to attend further individual training with the co-ordinator. Most learners have a good understanding of equality of opportunity. Staff also receive equal opportunities awareness training. The committee has arranged specialist training for staff on dyslexia and disabilities.

45. Access to the ground-floor classrooms, workshops and toilets at PSC's training centre is

good for those with restricted mobility. Allocated car park spaces are close to the ramped entry to reception. PSC recently commissioned an accessibility audit by a specialist consultant. The feedback from the consultant was good, with a few suggestions for improvement.

46. PSC recruits and supports learners with diverse needs. During the past two years, an effective partnership with a charitable organisation, which works with disengaged youngsters in local areas of social deprivation, has brought in over 50 learners to the work-based learning programmes. There are effective partnerships with staff at Connexions and many learners are referred to the E2E programmes. Several learners have received good social support from PSC and Connexions' staff during a personal crisis. PSC has recently contracted specialist support for learners with dyslexia.

47. The equal opportunities committee has a standing agenda item on analysis of data. Comparisons are made on the relative size and performance of the diverse groups among PSC's learners. This analysis evaluates retention and achievement rates against gender, ethnicity, learning needs and disability. However, such analysis has not yet made significant changes to the provision. The committee has identified action to be taken in promoting training to under-represented groups.

48. PSC's staff are involved in a wide range of activity to promote training opportunities to under-represented groups. Staff work effectively with the local charity in promoting training in construction trades to disengaged young people who live in areas of social deprivation in Plymouth. PSC has enabled access to financial incentives from the industry training board to recruit six women into apprenticeships. PSC provides 'taster' days aimed at promoting more women into construction and engineering. PSC is a particularly effective partner in the work of the local training provider network on such events. This network has enabled PSC's staff to also establish links with local minority ethnic groups. PSC uses their association with the Tamar Valley Consortium to promote work-based learning to pupils in a variety of schools. PSC specifically promotes construction and engineering training to female E2E learners at the college. Currently 3.5 per cent of PSC's work-based learners are classed as non-white British. Female representation at PSC is significantly higher than the national rate in construction trades.

49. Monitoring of equality of opportunity in work placements is insufficient. This is particularly relevant to the large number of small employers in construction and engineering. Equality of opportunity is checked at each new placement concurrently with a health and safety audit. Where an employer does not have an equal opportunities policy they are asked to comply with a policy statement supplied by PSC. Employers are given an introductory pack of information and they are sent updates on legislation changes by PSC. During progress reviews, learners are asked about their treatment in the workplace. However, there are insufficient checks to ensure that the policy, associated procedures and required changes are fully implemented in the workplace.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

50. PSC's quality improvement procedures cover the key stages of the learning process and have been applied effectively to improve the quality of provision. Implementation of the post-inspection action plan has ensured most of the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection have been resolved. Internal verification is much improved and it is now effective. A clear strategy and procedures are in place including a good sampling plan

for verifying portfolios. Feedback to assessors from internal verifiers is constructive and comprehensive. Actions are identified but the recording of actions that are completed is inconsistent. The quality manager, other managers and internal verifiers hold monthly meetings to agree standards and share good practice and updates from awarding bodies. A rigorous system is in place to ensure actions from external verifiers' reports are completed.

51. Graded observations of teaching and learning, reviews and assessment are carried out at least twice a year. Feedback, particularly from observations of teaching, is comprehensive and a personal action plan is devised to rectify weaknesses. Grades given by PSC for teaching and learning are similar to those given by inspectors, except in engineering where inspectors identified more satisfactory than good teaching. Responsibility for carrying out lesson observations is not shared by vocational specialists across the areas of learning. Arrangements are being developed for specialist staff from the college to carry out observations in construction and engineering.

52. The quality of provision and implementation of the self-assessment development plan is closely monitored through a number of subgroups which include staff development, subcontracting with the college, work-based learning and quality improvement. Each subgroup has appropriate representation, and meetings are scheduled for the whole year. Complaints are dealt with promptly according to the procedure, but information is not kept on when complaints are received.

53. Formal feedback is collected from learners and employers twice a year and is carefully analysed to assess satisfaction levels. Action is taken to improve provision after feedback. For example, learners' induction has been improved and the initial stage is now shorter and more focused. In the most recent survey, learners were very satisfied with their training but felt there was insufficient communication on their progress between PSC and their employers. Feedback is collected from employers by telephone and they are very satisfied with the training provider.

54. Quality improvement procedures are not adequately applied in a few areas. Arrangements for monitoring PSC's subcontractors are insufficient. Only one of the three subcontractors has a significant number of learners. This subcontractor, West Country Training, is visited twice a year by PSC's staff, but they only receive a verbal report. PSC is given the subcontractor's internal verifier reports, but it is not given the reports from the industry regulator who assesses the quality of training for lift truck drivers. Recruitment of electrical installation learners onto a programme subcontracted to the college stopped two years ago, but progress monitoring of the three continuing learners has been inadequate. Until recently, learners made very slow progress on their level 3 NVQ and key skills. Target-setting is inadequate in most areas of learning. Targets set at reviews are not specific enough and are often not timebound. An effective strategy for the development and assessment of key skills has not been established across the areas of learning. Action points shown in the minutes of meetings are not always followed up at the next meeting, particularly management meetings. Minutes from the management meetings do not clearly indicate that senior managers discuss data by intake, although it is carried out by period for the LSC.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Construction

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Construction crafts		
Apprenticeships for young people	84	2
Other government-funded provision	64	2

55. PSC has 148 learners in the construction crafts of carpentry and joinery, brickwork, painting and decorating, and glazing. Three advanced apprentices are working towards qualifications in electrical installation through a subcontract arrangement with the local college.

56. Eighty-seven learners are on directly funded apprenticeships, seven of whom are advanced apprentices. Apprentices are either in work placements or direct employment and most attend PSC on a day-release basis. Apart from electrical installation, all off-the-job training takes place in PSC's training centre, where learners have access to practical training workshops, classrooms and other study facilities. All learners have their suitability assessed by interview and a test of their literacy and numeracy skills. Induction takes place in the training centre and in the workplace. PSC has 11 trainer/assessors in construction crafts. Assessors visit work placements to monitor the learners' progress, to assess performance and communicate with employers.

57. PSC offers subcontracted training in a range of construction crafts for learners from the college and from the Tamar Valley Consortium. Of the 31 college learners, 12 are working towards NVQ-equivalent awards at levels 1 and 2, 17 are working towards a level 2 NVQ and two are on a level 3 NVQ. All of the 33 learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium are doing level 1 foundation construction awards.

Strengths

- high standard of practical work
- good teaching and learning
- well-planned programmes
- good assessment practice
- good work placements

Weaknesses

- incomplete knowledge of NVQs and key skills by employers
- small practical workshop areas

Achievement and standards

58. At the reinspection in 2002, the achievement rates were poor for apprentices. Retention and achievement rates are now satisfactory and improving. The current rate of framework completion for the 67 apprentices who started in 2002-03 is 46 per cent. Six of

the apprentices still in learning are making good progress. Of the 39 apprentices who started in 2003-04, seven have completed the framework and 22 remain in learning, representing a current retention rate of 74 per cent. Ninety-six per cent of the 2004-05 apprentices remain in learning.

59. Completion of qualifications by learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium and college subcontracted training is satisfactory. The achievement rate has progressively improved from 26 per cent in 2001-02 to 48 per cent in 2002-03 and 75 per cent for the 2003-04 learners. Over the past three years, PSC has recruited 80 learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium and 65 per cent have progressed into jobs or further training. The achievement rate for college learners remained at 43 per cent for 2002 and 2003.

60. The standard of the learners' work on background knowledge is satisfactory. Their written and drawing work is neat and orderly. Learners' portfolios of evidence demonstrate learning and progress. They are neat, carefully compiled and well cared for. There is good cross-referencing of evidence to the various units in the NVQ. Most portfolios contain photographic evidence from the workplace, as well as technical drawings and relevant manufacturers' literature. The learners take pride in their portfolios.

61. The standard of learners' practical work is good. Learners are required to work to fine tolerances and most of them achieve these. They rapidly develop skills of accuracy in marking out their work and most demonstrate confidence and ability in the use of hand tools. Many of the learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium had little prior experience of construction craft work and they have made rapid progress in the development of practical skills.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	0		4		4		5		5	100						
Retained*	0		0		1		1		3	60						
Successfully completed	0		0		1		1		2	40						
Still in learning	0		4		1		2		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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	53		39		67		39	100	37	100						
Retained*	0		24		53		21	54	21	57						
Successfully completed	0		7		31		13	33	15	41						
Still in learning	51		22		7		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

The quality of provision

62. The teaching and learning are good. In classroom sessions, learners are attentive and display motivation to learn. Their interest and involvement is maintained by frequent questioning by the trainer. Most learners readily respond to the questions and join in discussions. Trainers enliven the sessions by using relevant industrial anecdotes. Trainers make effective use of practical artefacts as visual aids to illustrate particular materials or technical aspects of construction. The practical workshop sessions are lively and well organised. Trainers interact well with learners and give individual demonstrations of techniques as and when required. Learners are motivated by the high level of individual guidance from the skilled trainers.

63. Learning programmes are well planned. Schemes of work and well-structured lesson plans are in place for the whole year. All learners have comprehensive individual learning plans which include details of additional learning support required. There are frequent scheduled progress reviews and assessments and portfolio-building sessions. Learners who need additional support attend extra sessions which are planned to meet the needs of learners and employers. Learners benefit from specialist support in literacy and numeracy.

64. Assessment practice is good with a detailed assessment schedule. The assessment process involves frequent visits to observe learners at work, sometimes on the upper levels of scaffolding. The assessor evaluates the learners' practical skills and thoroughly questions the learner's knowledge. The written feedback on the assessment includes a judgement on the learner's performance and background knowledge. Most employers assign an experienced craftsperson to act as the learners' mentor and work-based recorder. They are involved in the assessment process. There is a formal progress review in the learner's workplace every eight weeks and employers are involved in this.

65. Work placements are good. Construction employers who provide work placements are checked by PSC, and learners are carefully matched to the employers. Most are small local employers who provide a good range of relevant work experience. If an employer is unable to provide the full range of work experience to meet the NVQ requirements, they allow PSC to transfer the learner, on a temporary basis, to another employer. There are effective working relationships and communications between PSC and employers. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is satisfactory.

66. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. All work-based learners attend a literacy and numeracy assessment and where additional learning needs are identified, diagnostic tests are given to indicate specific areas of support. Good support is provided by specialist staff at PSC's training centre.

67. Key skills training is satisfactory. The training is arranged to take place early in the learner's programme in a specialist key skills training facility at the centre. Most of the key skills assignments have a relevant vocational focus which the learners appreciate. However, learners seldom recognise appropriate opportunities in the workplace to collect evidence towards their key skills. Most employers have little involvement in key skills training and assessment.

68. Most employers have a poor understanding of NVQs and the requirements of the apprenticeship framework. They are keen to help the learner, but find the information on

technical certificates, NVQ units and key skills complex.

69. The craft workshop areas in the PSC training centre are small and have limited storage capacity. The area for painting and decorating and for brickwork is small and can accommodate only a few learners at a time. The woodworking machinery area for carpentry and joinery is small. Overall workshop space for larger-scale projects and the associated storage areas for craft materials is insufficient. PSC is developing an arrangement with the college to make use of their workshops and external construction project areas for the larger-scale and more advanced craftwork.

Leadership and management

70. The provision is well planned and there have been many improvements since the previous inspection. Teamwork is good among managers, co-ordinators, trainers and assessors. Construction staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and there are good development opportunities for staff. The construction section has a higher proportion of women on craft courses than the national average for the construction workforce. The internal verification process is well organised and thorough, and effectively quality assures the assessment process and supports assessors. The provider's self-assessment report on construction is too critical. Some of the aspects cited as weaknesses in the self-assessment report were identified as satisfactory by inspectors.

Engineering, technology & manufacturing**Grade 3**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Motor vehicle/cycle</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	42	3
Other government-funded provision	19	3
NVQ training for young people	3	3
<i>Mechanical engineering</i>		
Apprenticeships for young people	15	3
Other government-funded provision	5	3

71. PSC has 64 learners on motor vehicle engineering programmes and 20 learners on welding and fabrication programmes. Sixty learners are on training that is directly funded by the LSC. Forty-nine of these are apprentices, eight are advanced apprentices and three are working towards NVQs at level 2 in motor vehicle engineering. Of the 42 apprentices in motor vehicle engineering, eight are working on vehicle body and paint operations and the remainder are working on vehicle maintenance and repair. All apprentices and advanced apprentices are employed. PSC currently works with 45 engineering companies or garages. PSC recruits learners and matches them to suitable employers, who then interview them and accept them initially on work placements. In a few cases, employers recruit apprentices themselves and approach PSC to provide training. All applicants are screened and attend an initial assessment and selection process, including an interview and skills tests in literacy and numeracy. There is a comprehensive induction onto PSC's programmes, which includes certificated sessions on health and safety, and equality of opportunity. Learners attend for one day a week at PSC's training centre for off-the-job training. Workplace progress reviews and assessment is carried out by one of PSC's seven trainer/assessors. Most of the work on key skills is currently delivered and assessed by PSC's staff in the training centre.

72. PSC offers subcontracted training in welding and motor vehicle maintenance and repair for learners from the college and from the Tamar Valley Consortium. Of the five college learners, four are working towards NVQs in motor vehicle engineering and the other is working towards an NVQ at level 2 in welding. Of the 19 learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium, four specialise in welding and the remainder are in motor vehicle engineering.

Strengths

- good progression by learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium
- well-structured off-the-job training
- good assessment practice in the workplace
- effective working relationships with employers
- good training resources for fabrication and welding

Weaknesses

- insufficient co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training

- weak target-setting
- insufficient key skills evidence from the workplace
- breaches of health and safety practice in a few work placements

Achievement and standards

73. The retention and achievement rates for apprentices are satisfactory and improving. The retention rate has increased from 42 per cent for the 2000-01 intake to 60 per cent for the 2002-03 intake. The current rate of framework completion for the 30 apprentices who started in 2002-03 is 40 per cent, significantly higher than for previous intakes. The four apprentices who are still in learning are making satisfactory progress. The current achievement rate for the 2003-04 intake is 36 per cent, with 54 per cent of learners still in learning. None of the apprentices have left from the 2004-05 intake.

74. Retention of the small number of advanced apprentices is good. PSC has recruited 10 advanced apprentices during the past three years. None of these have left the programme without completing the framework.

75. Achievement of qualifications by the learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium improved from 50 per cent in 2001-02 to 56 per cent in 2002-03. The achievement rate for 2003-04 increased to 84 per cent. Over the same period, 53 of the 78 learners from the Tamar Valley Consortium who started between 2001 and 2003, have progressed into jobs or further training, representing a progression rate of 68 per cent. Progression in the current year is good at 72 per cent.

76. In each of the previous three years, the number of college learners exceeded 60. Achievement rates improved from 45 per cent in 2001-02, to 54 per cent in 2002-03 and to 59 per cent in 2003-04.

77. The skills and knowledge demonstrated by learners is satisfactory.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	6		3		1	100	10	100	11	100						
Retained*	0		1		1	100	7	70	5	45						
Successfully completed	0		1		1	100	6	60	5	45						
Still in learning	6		2		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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	32		28		30		28	100	19	100						
Retained*	2		16		18		13	46	8	42						
Successfully completed	2		10		12		8	29	4	21						
Still in learning	30		15		4		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

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	1	100	3		8	100	30	100	19	100						
Retained*	1	100	0		5	62	13	43	12	63						
Successfully completed	1	100	0		3	38	13	43	8	42						
Still in learning	0	0	3		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

The quality of provision

78. The teaching in the training centre is satisfactory. Training sessions are well structured with detailed schemes of work and lesson plans. Schemes of work identify assessment opportunities and reference is made to the syllabus or NVQ criteria. Lesson plans clearly identify tutor and learner activity as well as the resources necessary to support learning. There are very good links between practical work and background knowledge. Resources are used well to consolidate learning and promote understanding by learners. Good use is made of audiovisual aids and engineering tools and equipment, including informative computer animations of motor vehicle systems. Learners work from good handouts but a few of the transparencies are unclear and contain too much text. Undirected questioning techniques are often ineffective and allow some learners to dominate the responses and others to remain passive. In some sessions, there is too much information given without adequate explanation. Punctuality is unsatisfactory in a few sessions.

79. Assessment practices in the workplace are good. Learners receive frequent visits from assessors who carry out assessments on practical tasks. Assessors help learners to collect NVQ evidence from the workplace and identify where evidence can be used towards specific criteria. They spend time discussing the learners' progress with workplace supervisors and agreeing workplace tasks which will best contribute towards the remaining criteria to be assessed. Learners receive prompt, detailed verbal and written feedback after an assessment. Assessors are effective in identifying daily tasks to satisfy the requirements of the NVQ. Portfolio evidence includes written reports by learners with witness testimony from workplace supervisors. All assessors have, or are working towards, appropriate assessor awards. New assessors are supported by mentors who carry out observations and discuss improvements.

80. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. All work-based

learners attend a literacy and numeracy assessment and where additional learning needs are identified, diagnostic tests are given to indicate specific areas of support. Good support is provided by specialist staff at PSC's training centre.

81. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is insufficient. A suitable range of learning opportunities are provided in many work placements, but this is not adequately co-ordinated by PSC. Employers are unaware of training or topics being covered in the training centre and PSC only collects information on training in the workplace retrospectively. Employers do not understand the NVQ and key skills well enough to effectively co-ordinate the tasks in the workplace with the work done at the training centre.

82. Target-setting is weak at the six-weekly progress reviews. Progress against targets from previous reviews are not sufficiently monitored and targets are often not clear enough to drive achievement or to guide the learner as to what is required. There are few targets for key skills or for completion of logbook evidence. Individual learning plans are not often updated during reviews. Workplace supervisors are not sufficiently involved in the review process but they are given a copy of the completed review paperwork. There are insufficient discussions between the learner, the supervisor and PSC's staff to help the learners' progress. Supervisors are not sufficiently aware of review targets to help the learner collect workplace evidence. The progress review document contains a helpful indication of percentage progress made on the NVQ units, key skills and the technical certificate.

83. Key skills training has improved since the previous inspection. They are now covered in the first six months of the apprenticeship programmes. Learners attend weekly key skills sessions in the training centre, where evidence is produced through assignments. However, insufficient evidence is collected from the workplace. Some off-the-job assignments have a vocational focus, but little use is made of cross-referencing from workplace evidence. During the last year staff have been trained to increase their understanding and confidence of working with key skills, but key skills are still delivered and assessed independently of the NVQ and technical certificate. Most workplace supervisors have little understanding or involvement with key skills work.

Leadership and management

84. There are sufficient trainers, assessors and internal verifiers to support learners. Engineering staff are experienced and qualified in their specialist area. Staff development is well focused to improve teaching, learning and assessment. PSC maintains effective working relationships with employers to arrange access to specialist tools, equipment and demonstrations of advanced techniques in the workplace. PSC's staff have worked well with employers to identify and provide additional training or qualifications for learners. A few employers have donated expensive equipment for use in the workshops at PSC. PSC provides a narrow range of programmes, but through its frequent and effective contact with employers it has ensured that programmes meet the needs of learners and employers.

85. Resources for fabrication and welding are good, with a wide selection of welding equipment and workshop machinery. Learners have access to equipment to carry out destructive and non-destructive testing on their completed welds to improve their understanding of weld composition and strengths. Resources in motor vehicle are generally satisfactory but some specialist areas, such as bodywork and repair, are reliant on accessing equipment and materials in the workplace.

86. Internal verification is now satisfactory. Sampling plans are comprehensive and cover all units and all learners. Assessors and internal verifiers meet each month to share good practice and to carry out standardisation. Feedback to assessors on the quality of assessment is detailed, but the associated action plans are not effectively followed up. The internal verification process is carried out throughout the assessment programme.

87. In a few work placements, breaches of health and safety practice were observed. PSC's health and safety officer carries out a comprehensive health and safety check of the premises of new employers. Engineering trainer/assessors carry out quarterly monitoring of health and safety in each work placement. Assessors generally use assessment by direct observation as a further opportunity to monitor health and safety in the workplace and they discuss hazards with learners during the assessment. However, in a few placements, learners were observed working unsafely or not using appropriate personal protective equipment. In one workplace, a learner was not corrected when using an unguarded pillar drill while being observed by an assessor and a mentor assessor. Learners were also observed using compressed air without appropriate protective measures, and grinding machines without wearing face protection. In the latter case, this was corrected by the assessor.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Business administration Apprenticeships for young people	34	2

88. There are 32 apprentices and two advanced apprentices in business administration. Most learners are recruited through direct advertising, and a few are referred to PSC by Connexions or employers. PSC arranges work placements for learners. Twenty-nine learners are currently with a large local public sector employer and the others are with private companies. Learners have an initial assessment and induction at the start of their programme. Most learners attend PSC's training centre on day release for training and portfolio-building. PSC has two trainer/assessors for business administration. PSC's staff visit learners frequently to carry out assessments in the workplace. Progress reviews are carried out every eight to 10 weeks.

Strengths

- good development of personal and practical skills
- good progression into employment
- good retention rates for apprentices
- well-planned and delivered off-the-job training
- very careful planning of work placements
- comprehensive induction programme

Weaknesses

- weak target-setting
- insufficient monitoring of key skills progress

Achievement and standards

89. Learners quickly develop good personal and practical skills in the workplace through effective coaching, mentoring and training. Their self-confidence increases as they learn to work under pressure, manage time, become adept at using specialist computer packages, become proficient at dealing with customers, and communicate well with all levels of staff. Some learners deal sensitively with patients and visitors in the local hospital in very stressful situations, employing diplomacy, tact and firmness. Supervisors value the contribution apprentices make and expand their job roles and responsibilities as learners feel able to cope. One learner, who has progressed from an apprenticeship to an advanced apprenticeship, has taken on extra responsibilities in supporting senior staff, dealing with correspondence and arranging events. Most learners have the opportunity to attend in-house and external job-related training such as customer service, telephone skills, data protection and specialist computer applications. Learners gain certificates from some of these courses.

90. Progression into jobs is good. In the past two years, 93 per cent of leavers have gained a job during or on leaving the programme. Over 50 per cent of these are with the

employer with whom they trained.

91. Retention rates were good at the previous inspection. They remain good and continue to improve. For apprentices who started in 2001-02 and 2002-03, the proportion of learners retained was 76 per cent and this has risen to 81 per cent for 2003-04. Completion rates for the framework are satisfactory and improving. The current achievement rate for the learners who started in 2003-04 is 50 per cent, and 46 per cent of learners are still in learning. Most current learners are making good progress. Their portfolios are of a high standard and well presented. The average time for completing the apprenticeship has decreased steadily and is now 14 months. However, some learners who were recruited in 2002-03 made slow progress towards achievement of qualifications. There were frequent changes of assessors until the end of 2004. A few of these learners have only recently completed their apprenticeship framework.

92. Achievement and retention rates for the small number of advanced apprentices are good. Between 2001-02 and 2002-03 the proportion of learners who completed the full framework was 63 per cent. Of the nine learners who were recruited in the past three years, only one has left without completing the framework.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Advanced apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	2		5	100	2		12	100	14	100							
Retained*	0		5	100	1		9	75	12	86							
Successfully completed	0		5	100	1		6	50	3	21							
Still in learning	2		0	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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	21		26		21	100	49	100	37	100							
Retained*	0		21		16	76	37	76	22	59							
Successfully completed	0		13		11	52	21	43	12	32							
Still in learning	20		12		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

The quality of provision

93. Off-the-job training is good. Schemes of work are well planned and facilitate learners joining at any time of the year. The training includes background knowledge for the technical certificate, key skills, and certificated sessions in equal opportunities and health and safety. Lessons are well structured and incorporate a variety of well-designed activities which engage learners' interest and develop team working and communication skills.

Learners enjoy lessons and participate enthusiastically. In one lesson, the trainer made good use of their own and learners' experience when discussing how to handle conflict in the workplace. There is good use of the internet for research purposes. Opportunities are taken by learners to discuss equality and diversity when completing documents such as application forms, as well as widening their vocabulary. Trainers are well qualified and experienced. Not all learners are able attend off-the-job training regularly because of work commitments, but assessors provide good individual support during workplace visits.

94. There is very careful and effective planning of work placements. PSC has established a good partnership with a large local public sector organisation to provide apprenticeship training in its departments. Department managers meet with PSC's staff when a training vacancy arises to discuss the job requirements, and how it matches the NVQ. Potential apprentices are recruited and screened by PSC through an initial interview, and this is followed by a second interview which is carried out by the employer on PSC's premises. If the applicant is suitable, the initial assessment for key skills and the signing-up process is put into place. In the few cases where the work placement is not suitable, another placement is found in the same organisation. Employers and learners appreciate this thorough matching process.

95. Learners receive a comprehensive induction. At PSC they receive information and guidance on their terms and conditions, their individual learning plan, the NVQ and key skills. They attend additional training sessions on health and safety, and equality of opportunity. Learners are well prepared for their programme. Most learners also receive an extensive two-day workplace induction which covers an introduction to personnel, on-the-job coaching, health and safety, terms and conditions, manual handling and extensive training on the specialist information system at their place of work. Learners receive certificates for completion of the manual handling and computer courses.

96. At the previous inspection, a narrow range of assessment methods was identified. Assessment practices have improved in the past year and are now satisfactory. Assessors visit learners frequently in the workplace and liaise well with employers. Most portfolios contain a variety of diverse evidence from the workplace including photographs. There are at least two assessments by direct observation covering each NVQ unit. However, feedback on these assessments is often too descriptive and does not always indicate whether the learner is competent. There is increased use of witness testimonies by workplace supervisors, but many do not specify how competence was demonstrated. There is insufficient use of professional discussion at level 3.

97. Initial assessment of literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. All learners attend a literacy and numeracy assessment and complete a learning styles questionnaire. Where additional needs are identified, diagnostic tests are given to indicate the level of support required. Good support is currently being provided for three learners who were recruited at entry level, and one has now progressed to level 2 in communications and level 1 in numeracy.

98. Target-setting is weak. The individual learning plans do not set specific targets to identify when different components of the framework will be achieved. Recording of information at progress reviews is insufficient and targets are too general. There is insufficient recording of health and safety or equality issues discussed. Employers are not fully aware of the progress their learners are making against all components of the

apprenticeship framework.

99. There is insufficient recording and monitoring of progress in key skills. Key skills are not systematically discussed during progress reviews. There is insufficient assessment planning or written feedback after a key skills assessment. Evidence for key skills includes evidence from the NVQ portfolio, but this is not cross-referenced at the same time as the NVQ evidence is assessed.

Leadership and management

100. The programme is well planned and well managed. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Team working and internal communications are effective. Relationships with employers are good. Staff development is good and staff have many opportunities to gain additional qualifications and attend awarding body meetings. New assessors and trainers are well supported through mentoring, shadowing and training.

101. Resources are satisfactory. Paper resources are professionally produced. Although there is good access to computers and the internet, the training room is sometimes hot and noisy. There are insufficient refreshment facilities on site.

102. Equality and diversity are well promoted, and learners feel well respected and protected from bullying and harassment. Learners from minority ethnic groups are under represented. PSC's staff are looking at ways to deal with this problem, including access to specialist guidance from the main employer.

103. Weaknesses have been dealt with systematically and continuously since the previous inspection, and there has been significant improvement in the quality of provision. Internal verification has improved, and is now effective in identifying poor practice and developing staff. Observation of the performance of trainers and assessors has improved teaching and assessment practice. Good practice is shared at standardisation meetings internally and with external provider networks. The self-assessment report was broadly accurate, but had not sufficiently taken into account improvements made in the last few months.

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

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Retailing		
Apprenticeships for young people	1	3
Other government-funded provision	3	3
Customer service		
Apprenticeships for young people	10	3
Warehousing and distribution		
Apprenticeships for young people	7	3
Other government-funded provision	8	3
Lift-truck awards		
Apprenticeships for young people	6	3

104. There are 24 learners on an apprenticeship programme. Ten are working towards a customer service qualification, seven in distribution and warehousing and one in retailing. The other six are on an apprenticeship for specialised plant and machinery operation, specifically lift truck driving. The training and assessment of lift truck learners is subcontracted to a specialist local provider. Most of the learners are employed, and a few are on a work placement which has been arranged by PSC. In addition to the apprenticeship programme, PSC also has responsibility for the training and assessment of 11 learners who are subcontracted from the college. Of these, eight are working towards a level 2 NVQ in distribution and warehousing and three are working towards a level 2 NVQ in retailing.

105. There are two staff with specific responsibility for the training and assessment of all the learners, except those with the subcontractor. Most training is on the job, although the lift truck learners and some customer service learners attend day-release off-the-job training at PSC's training centre. Most learners are visited in the workplace every two or three weeks by trainer/assessors, while reviews of progress are completed every eight weeks.

Strengths

- good retention and achievement rates for lift truck learners
- good off-the-job training
- good workplace support

Weaknesses

- slow progress towards unit achievement for some learners
- insufficient planning and recording of on-the-job training

Achievement and standards

106. Retention and achievement rates for lift truck learners are good. Up to the current year, all previous recruitment had been onto the NVQ-only programme. For this year, nine apprentices have been recruited for lift truck awards, three of whom have achieved the qualification and six remain in learning. Over the previous four years, the proportion of

retained learners has progressively increased from 75 per cent to 100 per cent. During that time, the achievement rate has improved from 50 per cent to 100 per cent.

107. Retention and achievement rates for apprentices in warehousing and customer service are now satisfactory, with an improving trend. For those who started in 2001-02 and 2002-03, the achievement rate is 42 per cent and 43 per cent respectively. For those who started in 2003-04, the current achievement rate is 44 per cent and 33 per cent of the learners are still in learning.

108. During the past three years, PSC has worked with 202 learners from the college. Recruitment this year is well below previous years. The achievement rates for these learners are satisfactory at an average of 51 per cent.

109. The standard of learners' work in the workplace is satisfactory. Learners demonstrate appropriate occupational skills and knowledge and adhere to relevant health and safety requirements. They show good commitment to their job and their qualifications. The work learners produce for their NVQ and technical certificates is of a satisfactory standard. They produce written statements of work performance and acceptable answers to background knowledge questions.

110. Progress towards completion of units is slow for some learners. Although learners are not staying beyond their target end date, they do not achieve individual units in a timely manner. Some customer service learners who have been training for six or seven months, have collected evidence but have not yet completed any units. A few distribution and warehousing learners have been training for between 10 and 16 months, and have only completed up to two units. There is insufficient assessment by observation in the workplace. Several learners have only been observed once in seven to 10 months. Another learner had a gap of over 12 months between assessments by observation. Assessment of key skills is introduced too late for a few learners. Reviews of progress do not include effective targets. Although progress is monitored in individual portfolios and a percentage completion indicator is shown on review documents, there is insufficient monitoring of progress across the area of learning.

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	25		9		7	100	12	100	8	100						
Retained*	3		7		4	57	8	67	3	38						
Successfully completed	3		4		3	43	5	42	0	0						
Still in learning	21		3		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

The quality of provision

111. Off-the-job training is good. The learners who are working towards a lift truck apprenticeship attend an initial three-day certificated course with the subcontractor. This training is well planned and is provided in a realistic working environment. The training

resources are good. Trucks are in good condition, the premises are clean and well-maintained including work and rest areas. Training rooms are well-equipped with furnishings and videos. Trainers are well-qualified and enthusiastic in their work.

112. The customer service apprentices who are working towards a technical certificate attend good off-the-job training at PSC's training centre. This is well planned and structured to meet the requirements of the qualification. It effectively develops the learners' customer service skills and knowledge. Learners attend one day a week for 10 weeks. The resources are good. The training room is well furnished, and overhead projectors are effectively used to support teaching. In addition to the morning training session, learners also attend for an afternoon of portfolio-building with good individual support from their trainer/assessor. Learners are able to carry out internet research and use computers and printers to produce good evidence for their portfolios. The trainer also takes learners on visits to local shops to evaluate standards of customer service to broaden their experience. However, those learners who started in 2004 had a poor experience of off-the-job training. Customer service learners were placed in a business administration class and they did not receive appropriate training or support. There was no specific off-the-job training available for customer service until March 2005.

113. All learners attend off-the-job training for certificated courses in health and safety, and equality of opportunity. However, the health and safety training is aimed at learners who are working in construction and warehousing environments, and customer service learners based in office jobs do not easily relate to it.

114. Workplace support is good. Supervisors support learners by carefully explaining how tasks should be carried out and identifying how learners can improve their performance. Training is primarily managed to meet the needs of the employer. Supervisors are supportive of the apprenticeship programme and help learners to produce NVQ evidence. Learners and supervisors confirm good progress in the development of skills and knowledge in relation to their job roles, as well as improvements in motivation and employability skills. Where learners are on placement, there are realistic opportunities for progression into employment. Most supervisors take part in the progress review process and are keen to help learners achieve their qualification. Learners who have additional needs receive good support from their supervisors. For example, a profoundly deaf learner is accompanied by a member of staff, for safety reasons, when using the lift truck. The learner has also been provided with a type-talk telephone. Trainer/assessors visit the workplace every two to three weeks and provide effective personal support and coaching.

115. Assessment is generally satisfactory. Learners take ownership of their portfolios and reference their evidence to the standards, which helps them to understand their NVQ. Assessors provide appropriate feedback and action planning.

116. Arrangements for additional learning support are satisfactory. Initial assessment effectively identifies individual support needs and this is clearly recorded in the individual learning plan. Some learners attend the centre to receive support from specialist staff, while others receive their support in the workplace. This support is generally well recorded. However, for a few learners the recording and monitoring of support is insufficient. The eight-weekly review process does not formally monitor and record the effectiveness of the support.

117. The planning and recording of on-the-job training is insufficient. Most learners only receive on-the-job training. At the start of the programme, a training and development plan is completed, but it does not adequately identify individual training needs, those responsible for implementation of the plan and how the training will be delivered. Learners who are in their first employment since school, or who are new to the job do not receive sufficient identification of their individual skills and areas for development. There is often confusion between training and assessment. Assessment methods are recorded when referring to training requirements. Recording of completion of training is often several months after the planned date and refers to completion of assessment. Reviews do not adequately monitor and record training that has been completed, nor do they effectively plan and target on-the-job training. Where an employer has a structured, recorded, training programme this is not always linked to the training required for the NVQ. There is insufficient use of learning materials to support on-the-job training.

Leadership and management

118. Effective action has been taken to provide good off-the-job training in customer service. However, there is insufficient planning of on-the-job training. Staff have good occupational experience and there are many opportunities for further staff development. Staff are currently working towards level 4 qualifications in learning and development, as well as receiving regular generic training in equality and diversity. There is effective internal communication and staff work well together. Monthly staff meetings are effectively used to keep staff up to date. There are good working relationships and effective communication with partners, including employers and subcontractors.

119. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality of opportunity. It is well covered at the start of the programme when learners attend a course and complete an assignment to check their understanding. The subject is covered again during reviews, and is also included in the customer service off-the-job training session. Learners are employed or on placement with employers who have appropriate policies and procedures in equality. Learners are well treated and well supported by staff and employers.

120. Staff are positive about identifying areas in need of improvement. They are keen to learn and improve their performance. Internal verification has improved and the system is now satisfactory. There is clear feedback and action-planning provided for assessors. The process includes observation of assessors at work and interviews with learners. However, some improvements are not established and the process has not been effective in identifying slow progress, and the insufficient use of observation as an assessment method.

121. The monitoring of subcontractors' performance is satisfactory. There is a clear service level agreement between the parties. Communication is frequent and effective when planning the training and monitoring learner attendance and achievement. There are two visits a year to monitor the provision and external verifier reports are reviewed. However, most feedback is verbal, and there is no formal written report following the monitoring visits to record concerns and action plans for improvements.

122. The self-assessment process effectively involved staff, who contributed their views at specific self-assessment review days as well as discussions at staff meetings. Employers and learners are not familiar with the self-assessment process, but their views are sought through feedback mechanisms. The report identified the strengths and weaknesses of the provision, with the exception of the slow progress towards unit achievement.

Foundation programmes**Grade 2**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<i>Employability/employment training</i> Entry to Employment	61	2

123. PSC Training provide an E2E programme which is vocationally focused and offers young people the opportunity to engage in training in the engineering and construction industries. Training is currently offered in motor vehicle maintenance and repair, welding, wood, trowel and decorative occupations and plastering. The programme is delivered on a subcontract arrangement with the college. Referrals are made by Connexions' personal advisers. Initially, learners attend the training centre for 16 hours a week, which increases to 24 hours a week following the completion of an agreed learning plan. The average length of stay is 22 weeks. All learners take part in planned work experience, where attendance increases to 30 hours a week. Learners are able to achieve relevant vocational qualifications and progress to apprenticeships and/or employment. There are currently 61 learners on the programme, 41 of whom are in construction and 20 in engineering.

Strengths

- very good learning support
- well-planned programme to meet learners' needs
- very good matching of learners to employers
- good teamwork

Weaknesses

- insufficient recording of learners' personal and social development
- insufficient analysis of data to monitor programme performance

Achievement and standards

124. Progression rates for learners are satisfactory. In 2003-04, 96 learners started the programme, 55 per cent of whom progressed into apprenticeships and/or employment. In 2004-05, 88 learners joined the programme. Currently, 19 per cent have progressed to apprenticeships and/or employment and 69 per cent are still in learning.

125. Learners' gain relevant qualifications and awards during their time on the programme. During 2003-04, nine learners gained a level 1 NVQ in construction and a further 30 gained units towards this qualification. In the same year, seven learners gained a level 1 NVQ in engineering and a further 15 learners gained units towards the NVQ. Additionally, all learners achieved a foundation health and safety certificate and 92 learners achieved a certificate in equal opportunities awareness.

126. PSC places great emphasis on learners' attendance at the training centre and their work placement. In the period from August 2004 to May 2005, the attendance rate was 93 per cent.

127. The standard of learners' practical work is good. Trainers expect the quality of learners' work to reflect their experience and always encourages them to improve. E2E learners work alongside apprentices in the training centre classrooms and workshops. Their practical skills and standard of work compares well with that of apprentices.

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Entry to Employment	2004-05		2003-04														
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	88		96	100													
Progression ¹	17		53	55													
Achieved objectives ²	21		77	80													
Still in learning	61		0	0													

1. Measured in terms of learners' movement to further training, education or employment, during or after their training

2. These being the key objectives identified for each learner while on E2E

The quality of provision

128. There is very good learning support. All learners take part in an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills during induction. Those learners who are identified as being at entry level have a further diagnostic assessment to identify specific areas of weakness. Learners who are identified between levels 1 and 2 also have a further diagnostic assessment to determine the level of support needed to progress. Currently there are two learners receiving specialist support for dyslexia. Additional learning support is well planned and learners' progress is routinely and comprehensively recorded. Learners keep portfolios of their work. Resources are good and effective use is made of the internet and computer software to improve and enhance learning. When learners have made adequate progress on literacy and numeracy skills, their activity plan includes key skills, at least at level 1. Key skills support is delivered jointly by the skills for life tutor and the vocational tutor.

129. The E2E programme is well planned and meets learners' needs. Most of the learners made a vocational career choice before starting the programme. Many have previous experience within the engineering and construction industries. Some have poor employment experiences, including redundancy. Most learners do not have adequate entry qualifications for mainstream training in engineering or construction. To ensure that achievement and progression is a realistic option for learners, PSC will only recruit young people whose literacy and numeracy skills have been assessed at entry level 3 or above. Learners are given the opportunity to take part in formal training in a supportive environment. They work towards the achievement of relevant vocational qualifications and gain industrial experience during planned work experience. Learners demonstrate a mature attitude during their training and are made aware of the need for strict adherence to matters concerned with health and safety while in the training centre and at the workplace.

130. There is very good matching of learners to employers. All learners take part in planned work experience during their time on the programme. At the time of inspection, 40 per cent of learners had a work placement. PSC's staff are very aware of the importance of ensuring a good match between learner and employer, and of the expectations of both parties. Care is taken to ensure that learners' career choices are taken into account in terms of size of company and its main activities. The geographical location

is also considered to ensure that learners are able to travel easily and economically. Trainers often enable learners to move placements to one better suited to the learner and employer. Employers are very supportive and committed to training young people. There are high sustainability rates for E2E learners who have progressed into apprenticeships and/or employment. In 2003-04, 34 learners progressed to an apprenticeship and 31 are still on their programme. In the same year, 19 learners gained full-time employment, 14 of whom are still with the same employer.

131. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Trainers are experienced in their vocational areas and are either suitably qualified or currently working towards the achievement of relevant qualifications. Learning sessions are well planned and suitable resources are made available. Trainers ensure that the aims and objectives are made clear and are understood by learners at the start of all sessions. Good use is made of ICT as an integral part of learning. There are varied activities to engage learners' interest. However, in some sessions learners are allowed to adopt a passive role. There is some overuse of worksheets. Resources are satisfactory. Learners have good access to computers and a range of suitable classrooms and workshops. However, the motor vehicle workshop is overcrowded at certain times in the week.

132. There is insufficient recording of learners' personal and social development. The initial six-week period of the E2E programme is designed to identify barriers to learning and progress. From this information, an individual learning plan is compiled and key objectives are recorded. However, the key objectives are standard for all learners, other than the specific vocational qualification. There is insufficient emphasis in the document concerning personal and social issues. While many of the referral notes from Connexions' personal advisers include information on self-esteem and a lack of confidence, these barriers do not appear on learning plans. Learning plans are not adequately used as part of the review process.

Leadership and management

133. All members of staff involved with the E2E programme work well as a team. Staff routinely share good practice and are all involved in supporting learners to overcome barriers and achieve their aims. Staff demonstrate flexibility and often modify learners' timetables or vocational choices to take account of changing circumstances. Vocational trainers are very positive about the E2E programme and ensure that learners' training opportunities equate to apprenticeships. Staff have particularly good working relationships with Connexions personal advisers and other colleagues at the college. Good teamwork has helped several learners overcome social barriers.

134. There is insufficient analysis of data to monitor programme performance. While PSC has comprehensive management information systems, they are not used systematically to produce relevant indicators that would confirm good practice or identify areas for improvement. Programme managers do not routinely examine data, such as overall attendance and the sustainability of progression routes.

135. PSC produced a short self-assessment report for their E2E programme shortly before the inspection. The report is comprehensive in its description of the provision and accurately identifies most of the strengths and weaknesses.

