

INSPECTION REPORT

ISIS Training Services Limited

02 September 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
- **learnndirect** 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

ISIS Training Services Limited

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. ISIS Training Services Limited (ISIS) is a subsidiary of the Oxford and District Training Group (ODTG). ODTG is a registered charity that is owned by 25 engineering companies and was set up in 1975 to provide training for its member companies. ISIS was established 14 years ago to provide training for those companies, and others, operating outside of the charitable constraints of the ODTG. ISIS provides a range of short engineering courses on a commercial basis, but mainly works with the Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Learning Skills Council to provide engineering training programmes for young people across the local area.

2. The company operates from modern premises in an office park at Long Hanborough, near Oxford. It has seven full-time staff, including three training officers who carry out assessment and training activities with the learners. ISIS also uses part-time staff and consultants to cover such things as accounts, and health and safety. Generally, subcontracted colleges provide the academic elements of the various training programmes in the vicinity of the learners' place of work.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

3. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** ISIS's leadership and management are satisfactory, as are its arrangements for equality of opportunity and quality improvement. In engineering, manufacturing and technology, the provision is good.

4. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The self-assessment process takes place routinely, and fully involves all staff. A development plan properly identifies the areas of strength to be maintained and the weaknesses that need correction. It sets out appropriate responsibilities and timescales for action. However, the process does not fully reflect the views of learners, employers or associated colleges, and it does not include a satisfactory range of objective information. The development plan is not reviewed as a part of regular work or meetings.

5. **The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements.** The quality of provision in the only area of learning has improved since the previous inspection. Overall achievement and retention data and trends show a slight improvement over the years, with the exception of the 2002-03 intake of advanced apprentices. Most of the identified weaknesses have been dealt with since the previous inspection. The strategy for dealing with literacy, numeracy and language training is taking time to develop fully. The insufficiently thorough self-assessment process, and the limited use of the associated development plan, mean that senior managers and trustees have limited information on which to measure and plan improvements. There are no clear priorities for improvement action, as opposed to business growth.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR ISIS TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- ensure that there is a thorough and systematic approach to gathering and acting on information and data for quality improvement purposes
- implement effective strategies to meet learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs
- reinforce equality of opportunity with staff, learners and employers
- maintain the high-quality level of support to learners
- continue to build on the work already done in improving the delivery of key skills

GRADES

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

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

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Engineering		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	72	2	
NVQ training for young people	4	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

6. Following a pre-inspection analysis, inspectors did not visit the subcontracted colleges that provide training for some of the academic elements of the training. Inspectors visited ISIS once before the main inspection visit to view the induction course for a new group of learners. Inspectors examined most aspects of the one area of learning provided by ISIS, engineering and manufacturing technologies, although there was a limited review of internal verification practices. Employer visits concentrated on those firms with several learners.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	10
Number of learners interviewed	25
Number of staff interviewed	11
Number of employers interviewed	8
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	11
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	2

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

7. **The work of learners is of a particularly high standard.** The work that learners do towards their national vocational qualifications (NVQs) is comprehensive, carefully assessed and particularly well recorded. Learners carry out a range of challenging and interesting engineering tasks in their employment.

8. Achievement and retention rates are satisfactory. There has been a variation in achievement rates for the main programme of advanced apprenticeships, from a barely satisfactory 43 per cent to a more recent good 72 per cent. Over the past two years most learners have remained on their training programmes and their progress is generally good.

9. The only learning sessions observed were those on the first day of induction training for new learners.

The quality of provision

10. **Support for learners is particularly effective.** The company's training officers make regular, detailed and very helpful visits to learners in their workplaces. Learners feel confident that they can easily contact their training officer to discuss training or personal problems. Training officers also make regular and useful review visits to learners while they are on full-time college courses.

11. **The quality of initial advice and guidance provided to learners is good.** ISIS has a

comprehensive range of recruitment and advice material, and good presentations to potential learners. Those that show an interest in an engineering programme receive an effective range of interviews and tests that help to clarify their ambitions, and link them well to suitable employment opportunities.

12. ISIS makes particularly good use of high-quality work placements. The company selects employers carefully and ensures that they offer a range of experiences to meet the learners' needs. Most learners acquire a broad range of hand and machining skills. ISIS and the employers carefully plan the work most learners carry out, to give them a good range of skills and meet the requirements of learning plans.

13. Resources are satisfactory. The training accommodation at ISIS is appropriate for the small-class sessions that it runs at its premises. The number and experience of staff are appropriate to the task. Induction for learners is comprehensive, with a satisfactory initial induction course and then appropriate refresher sessions later in the programme.

14. There are appropriate progress and assessment reviews. The monthly visits to the workplace and colleges provide learners with good short-term motivation and direction, although there is insufficient discussion of long-term progress.

15. ISIS does not provide sufficient diagnosis of, and formal support for, the individual needs of learners. There is some effective initial general screening and broad identification of their needs, particularly those relating to literacy and numeracy. Training officers then offer some welcome individual support. However, the support does not always take into account the learners' self-declared needs, or the results from other sources such as colleges. The support provided is not always appropriate, and it is not recorded clearly to allow for monitoring and further assessment.

Leadership and management

16. ISIS has taken positive and effective steps to develop its business to ensure that it can continue to provide appropriate support to learners. Trustees and senior staff have tackled declining recruitment, and income, with a variety of successful short- and medium-term actions. The recruitment of a dedicated marketing manager has proved particularly effective. It allows the company to increase the number of employers it works with, the number of learners it can recruit, and removes some administrative tasks from the training staff.

17. ISIS has good partnerships with employers that support training. In several cases, ISIS's staff have helped employers to change the work and training patterns for learners so that they can better meet the requirements of the apprenticeship programme. There are good links between ISIS and the employers to ensure that learners and the training programmes match the employment offered. Several of the employers play an active part in the extensive and effective recruiting campaigns that ISIS arranges.

18. The company's approaches to widening participation and promoting engineering apprenticeships are particularly effective. Working well with partner organisations, ISIS uses well-designed recruitment material, which it distributes extensively. This activity leads to a series of well-regarded recruitment evenings that ensure contact with as wide a range of potential learners as possible. Parents and guardians are particularly well involved in the

recruitment process. There has been a good increase in the numbers entering engineering courses, including more women and learners from minority ethnic groups. The ODTG sponsors some ISIS learners through their first year of study if they have been unable to find an appropriate employer to support them.

19. Trends in overall achievement and retention rates show a general trend towards improvement, with the exception of the 2002 group of learners. Engineering, which was judged satisfactory on previous inspections, has now improved and is judged to be good.

20. Communication within the company is satisfactory. There are appropriate staff appraisals and some satisfactory staff training, although there is insufficient training on equality of opportunity and limited professional updating.

21. The company's resources are appropriate to the task. There is an adequate number of appropriately experienced staff for the current number of learners.

22. Internal verification had been judged as a strength at previous inspections, and appears to be maintaining the same high standards. Policies and procedures that were extensively revised for the previous inspection have had only minimal updates, but remain fit for their current purpose.

23. The company has recently written a strategy for dealing with learners' literacy, numeracy and language needs. The basic concept of the strategy is satisfactory, but detailed implementation is slow.

24. The company maintains satisfactory links with the learners' colleges that provide most of the academic element of the training programme. ISIS has appropriate service level agreements, which it monitors adequately. The company's training officers visit the colleges to discuss progress with learners and to review the quality of teaching and learning.

25. **The company's monitoring of equal opportunities is insufficient.** Current policies and procedures have been reviewed, but do not cover the company's responsibilities under the Children Act 2004. Although there is a satisfactory introduction to the principles of equal opportunities on the induction course, the associated learners' guides are unsatisfactory. There are no formal arrangements or records made of employers' equal opportunities policies. Staff have not received sufficient training on equal opportunities. Some training officers now cover equal opportunities issues in detail on their visits, but this is a recent innovation and not all training officers apply this consistently.

26. The company has not sufficiently established feedback systems to gather learners' and employers' views. A system for gathering learners' views was tried in 2004 but it was unsuccessful. ISIS has implemented a revised system and the recent trawl for information is proving to be more successful. However, it is not clear how the company will review and use data, and some immediately identified problems have not been dealt with. The company's informal links with employers are good, but ISIS gathers little in the way of objective views and data.

27. **ISIS's self-assessment process is insufficiently thorough.** The system, based on reviews of a document raised by senior staff, involves all staff to some degree. There is

insufficient input from learners, employers, trustees and partner organisations, and limited use of data. The layout of associated development plans is satisfactory, but the plans are not a significant feature of relevant meetings or staff activity.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good business development to ensure appropriate support to learners
- good partnerships with employers to support training
- highly effective approaches to increasing participation in engineering training from all elements of the community

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established learners' and employers' feedback systems
- insufficiently thorough self-assessment process

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Engineering

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly high standard of learners' work
- highly effective support for learners
- good employment advice and guidance for learners
- high-quality work placements

Weaknesses

- insufficient diagnosis of and formal support for the individual needs of learners

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT ISIS TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED:

- 'the recruiting presentations - they were really good and helpful'
- 'the explanations of the course when we started were detailed and useful'
- 'putting me in contact with employers looking for apprentices was just what I needed'
- 'ISIS helped sort out things at work so that I could do a variety of jobs and complete my NVQ'
- 'my training officer is brilliant'
- 'my training officer is always there when you need him - very easy to contact'
- 'meeting other people with the same level of interest in engineering'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK ISIS TRAINING SERVICES LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:

- 'the paperwork - too much of it and much is repetitive'
- 'communication in, and with, the college'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good business development to ensure appropriate support to learners
- good partnerships with employers to support training
- highly effective approaches to increasing participation in engineering training from all elements of the community

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring and reinforcement of equality of opportunity
- insufficiently established learners' and employers' feedback systems
- insufficiently thorough self-assessment process

28. ISIS has taken positive and effective steps to develop its business, to ensure appropriate support for the learners. The company was facing declining numbers of learners being recruited, and fewer companies seeking apprentices. Resources were at risk. A committed and fully involved board of trustees, working with senior staff, have set up a series of initiatives and short- and medium-term targets. The recruitment of a marketing manager has proved particularly effective. A number of new companies have expressed an interest in taking on apprentices. Learner recruitment is much higher than previously, with 34 learners being recruited for the current year of training, compared with 13 last year and 24 in the previous year. ISIS now operates in new geographic areas, and the challenges of supporting learners at a distance are being overcome, partly by partnerships with other agencies. The number of companies involved in the parent group is slowly increasing, giving learners more opportunities and a higher income. A modest but effective revision of the ISIS brand, advertising material and website has made the relevant material appear more professional and clearer to learners and employers. ISIS is now able to maintain staff levels to support current learners. The new marketing manager role has reduced the pressure on training staff to carry out some marketing activities, allowing them more time to support learners. Despite these changes, trustees are taking a balanced view of risk and are maintaining the core ISIS strengths.

29. ISIS has good partnerships with employers to support training. In several cases, ISIS's staff are helping companies change their training and employment patterns to ensure that learners receive a full range of work experience and the opportunity to complete their NVQs. Some companies are adopting ISIS's approaches in their routine training for other staff. Senior staff from ISIS meet training and production managers in companies to discuss which apprenticeship programmes might benefit those companies, and to clarify what type of learner the company is interested in employing. Several companies take an active part in ISIS's recruitment campaigns, attending the presentations to potential learners and their parents, and providing helpful advertising material. Companies that have a long-term relationship with ISIS seek its assistance in finding potential apprentices. ISIS works closely with companies to ensure that learners have the most appropriate training. In one instance, a company was keen to have a learner start an apprenticeship at a time well after the associated college courses had started. An ISIS training officer negotiated with the college

and set up an individual, shortened programme. ISIS supports some learners in companies who have finished their funded training, but have requested additional support and guidance.

30. Communication inside the company is satisfactory. A single open-plan office and a positive attitude among staff create a good atmosphere for sharing routine information. This is backed up by a series of regular and appropriately minuted meetings. ISIS has a range of policies and procedures, mainly dealing with administrative aspects of the company's work rather than the immediate support of learning. It introduced many of these policies and procedures during the previous reinspection. They remain fit for their purpose after minor reviews but they lack the detail and scope to support training in an expanded business. Staff appraisal systems are satisfactory. Appraisal and job descriptions are well linked to a system of clearly articulated targets. There is a routine review of some of these targets, notably the frequency of visits to learners and the quality of reports following visits.

31. The company's staff have appropriate experience and skills. The company makes good use of administrative staff to support learners in initial recruitment, assessment and induction. Overall, staff training is satisfactory. New staff have had appropriate inductions and have completed relevant training qualifications. There is some professional development, such as computer numeric control machining courses. However, there are no formal plans for updating of professional competence in specialist areas and there are some deficiencies in training in aspects of equality of opportunity and in literacy, numeracy and the use of language.

32. ISIS has appropriate resources to support the current learners. It has enough training officers to ensure that learners have lengthy, detailed and effective monthly visits. Staff are well equipped with administrative and training resources. ISIS obtains additional funds to pay for learner support from companies that have apprentices. ISIS's main premises are generally only used by learners during induction, key skills support and specialist courses. They are modern, bright, and provide a good training environment. Additional funds, to improve the learners' access to ISIS's material through the internet, have been obtained through ISIS's involvement in a Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE). The CoVE involvement has also improved working relationships with other training providers and local colleges to the benefit of the learners. ISIS's management of resources is satisfactory.

33. ISIS has recently developed a strategy describing how it will help those with literacy, numeracy and language needs. External consultants have assisted in checking the relevance and potential effectiveness of the strategy, and it is a reasonable framework for future work. However, the company has not yet implemented the strategy.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

34. ISIS has been highly effective in its approach to widening the participation of learners from under-represented groups and promoting engineering apprenticeships. It has established good links with several local schools and works with its parent company, ODTG, to supply three schools with engineering equipment for pupils. ISIS has developed an effective working relationship with Connexions, which helps the company to send advertising material to all school leavers in the area. Learners are invited to a presentation evening to hear about the opportunities available in engineering. Most importantly, ISIS encourages parents and guardians to attend these events, so they can hear about the

apprenticeship programme and have the chance to find out more about the future prospects for their children from employers and current apprentices. Learners regard these presentation sessions as effective. All young people who complete applications forms are invited to attend an initial assessment session. During this time they participate in a range of assessments to check their potential to complete the programmes and to ensure they are aware of what is involved. The company uses a well-structured individual interview to establish the learners' level of interest and types of engineering companies they would like to work with. ISIS sends learners' details to potential employers, which select young people who match their criteria. For the current year, 2005-06, ISIS has been successful in recruiting two female learners and three learners from minority ethnic groups, compared with one and nil in previous years. There is no statistically significant difference in the achievement and retention rates of learners from different groupings.

35. Each year, a few learners who are unable to secure employment, and are very keen to become engineering apprentices, are awarded a bursary from ODTG so they can start the programme. They generally then take up employment following completion of their first year at college and a period of work experience. ISIS is well aware of the need to increase the number of female apprentices or those from minority ethnic groups. Two members of staff have attended a training session to increase their appreciation of training women in engineering. A marketing manager has been recruited to raise the profile of engineering apprenticeships among different groups of young people. They have started to develop a range of professional marketing materials and information. However, some of the materials, particularly the information for employers, contain insufficient references to equality and diversity.

36. The company's monitoring of equal opportunities is insufficient. ISIS has developed several policies and procedures relating to equality and diversity. The current equal opportunities policy has been reviewed but not updated to reflect current legislation. In particular, there are no references to the Children Act 2004, and the company has not established any processes to guide staff on how to deal with specific issues or concerns relating to young people. The current policy is very detailed and difficult to understand. It covers a wide range of topics, including bullying and harassment, as well as the displaying of potentially offensive materials. ISIS has developed a supplementary policy for learners, but this describes the full policy rather than summarising it in simple terms. There are no formal arrangements or records of checks made of employers' equal opportunities policies. There are no reviews to ensure that these are updated regularly and that learners have been briefed on any changes. Staff have not received sufficient training and development in equality and diversity. In the past two years only one training session has taken place. Learners receive a good introduction to equal opportunities during their induction and their knowledge is tested. There is insufficient reinforcement of equal opportunities throughout the training programmes. In the past four to six months, some training officers have started to discuss various equal opportunities issues with learners, such as disability discrimination and bullying. The method of recording what is discussed and how equal opportunity is reinforced is inconsistent.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

37. Annual achievement and retention rates, with one exception, show a general trend towards improvement in quality of provision. Achievement figures for all learners at ISIS increased slightly between 1999 and 2000, from 53 per cent to a satisfactory 56 per cent. For the 2001 group of learners, there has been a marked improvement to a good 73 per

cent achievement, with one learner still in training. In the next year, 2002, there will be a drop in the achievement rate, although many learners are still working towards their learning goals, as 39 per cent of learners have already left their programme, giving a maximum potential achievement of 61 per cent. However, in the two most recent years of training, a creditable total of 86 per cent of learners remain in training and are making good progress, and in two instances have already completed their learning plans.

38. At the previous two inspections the one area of learning, engineering, was judged to be satisfactory. There has been an improvement in the provision, and the area of learning is now judged to be good. Since the previous inspection, ISIS has tackled all the weaknesses and some of the points identified as areas for improvement. Some of the previous weaknesses such as employers' knowledge of the apprenticeship framework, although not now seen as a significant weakness, still require further reinforcement. Most strengths have been maintained or improved, although the work to improve policies and procedures seen as a strength at the previous inspection has not been maintained at the same level.

39. Support for the academic elements of learners' courses is provided through local colleges, particularly Abingdon and Witney college. The college provision was not inspected as a direct part of the ISIS inspection. There are satisfactory links with colleges to ensure quality of provision. The company has put in place detailed service level agreements and monitors them appropriately. ISIS's staff visit their learners at colleges each month to review their progress and deal with their concerns. Although ISIS relies on college quality assurance systems, training officers from ISIS also observe a small number of relevant classes during the year, to confirm the quality of teaching and learning. Specific problems raised by learners and employers have been taken up with the colleges. Most have been resolved satisfactorily, though some improvements that ISIS wanted have not been possible or agreed.

40. Internal verification was seen a strength at the previous inspection. During this inspection it was not reviewed in detail, although the main aspects appear quite satisfactory. There is some good use of standard internal verification practices being applied in a wider way to improve quality of provision, for instance with a very detailed system of reviewing learners' reports by new members of staff. There is some sharing of good practice, through regular meetings of assessors, routine discussions between staff and the dissemination of samples of effective work by staff.

41. Learners' and employers' feedback systems are insufficiently established. There were attempts to improve learners' feedback at the end of the 2004 training year. However, the information received was insufficient to allow any meaningful analysis and thus quality improvement. A significantly changed system is now in place. A far more active use of training officers, and linking provision of feedback with incentives, is generating more data. There is also some data now obtained at the end of induction, and from learners for marketing research. However, at the time of the inspection, data was still being retrieved. It was not clear how ISIS was to analyse this data and use it for quality improvement. Learners had identified some specific instances of concern, but there was no immediate response to those. There is a similar picture in terms of employers' feedback. There are a small number of employers that are very involved with ISIS, and they make their views known through various meetings, such as ODTG's 'breakfast meetings' and ODTG's annual general meeting, or through their representatives on the board of trustees. However,

attempts to gain more detailed employers' feedback for quality purposes have failed. The marketing manager is introducing a new system, but as yet it is not clear how successful this will be and how the company will analyse data and use it for quality improvement purposes.

42. ISIS's self-assessment process is insufficiently thorough. There have been six main self-assessment reports, with some updates. The reports are mainly generated by the managing director, reviewed by the administrative officer, then examined and revised by all staff. There is no formal input from learners, employers or partner colleges. The trustees are not involved in the development of the report, only in the review of the final version. Retention and achievement rates are the only formal data used to analyse the quality of provision. There is a significant amount of description, rather than analysis, in the self-assessment process. This detracts from the effect of the identified strengths and improvements required. Associated development plans list the few weaknesses identified, and set out the required actions. The development plans do not feature as a regular part of formal meetings or reviews. The improvements needed, identified in the latest version of the report, are different to those identified on inspection.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Engineering		2
Apprenticeships for young people	72	2
NVQ training for young people	4	2

43. ISIS has 76 learners on a variety of engineering, manufacturing and technology programmes. Thirty-four of the learners have just completed a six-month recruitment, assessment and induction period, but they have not started formal training. Fifty-five learners are advanced apprentices and 17 are apprentices. There are a further four learners studying on NVQ-only programmes from previous years, although ISIS no longer recruits to these NVQ programmes. All learners are following programmes in engineering, including mechanical, electrical, engineering production, technical services, engineering maintenance and aircraft maintenance. Nearly all learners are employed, with four learners on supported bursaries at colleges while they await suitable employment. Many learners complete a NVQ at level 2 during their first year of training at a local further education college, usually as full-time students. Most learners attend Abingdon and Witney college, although some attend more conveniently located colleges. Once learners have completed their NVQ at level 2, they receive training in the workplace towards an NVQ at level 3 and attend a college for one day each week to study for a craft or national certificate qualification. ISIS's training staff provide the learners with training towards the relevant key skills throughout the training programme. Progress reviews and work-based assessments take place every four weeks.

Engineering

Grade 2

Strengths

- particularly high standard of learners' work
- highly effective support for learners
- good employment advice and guidance for learners
- high-quality work placements

Weaknesses

- insufficient diagnosis of and formal support for the individual needs of learners

Achievement and standards

44. The rates of achievement and retention are satisfactory and these are broadly in line with those for engineering training provided by similar providers. However, since the previous inspection and reinspection, increased attention has been given to supporting and retaining learners, and there are early indications of improved retention for the more recently recruited intakes of learners. For instance, only four learners out of 31 have left the apprenticeship programmes over the past two full years. Learners that are retained are

generally successful.

45. Learners' practical work and their portfolios of evidence are of a particularly high standard. Many learners are working in specialist engineering environments, where they are required to work with non-engineers to produce one-off or limited-run components. They respond to these challenges well and produce detailed design drawings and components to a very high level of precision. For example, one learner is working with a wide range of non-traditional engineering materials, including exotic wood veneers, glass, rubber and aluminium, to produce high-quality automotive interiors for prestigious vehicles. Others are working in specialist scientific environments producing micro-engineered components to very high standards. Learners produce detailed and meticulous portfolios of evidence that are well structured. They make particularly good use of a wide range of evidence, including photographs and videos, along with drawings and other documentary evidence. Learners speak with a high degree of pride and enthusiasm about their work and their personal achievements. They display particularly high levels of confidence and competence in their engineering 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	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99		
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	26		6		15		17		10	100	14	100	18	100	25	100	
Retained*	0		0		0		0		8	80	6	43	9	50	13	52	
Successfully completed	0		0		0		0		7	70	5	36	8	44	13	52	
Still in learning	26		5		14		8		1	10	1	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

LSC funded work-based learning																	
Apprenticeships	2005-06		2004-05		2003-04		2002-03		2001-02								
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	8		7		3	100	2	100	2	100							
Retained*	0		0		0	0	0	0	2	100							
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0	2	100							
Still in learning	8		7		1	33	1	50	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	2003-04		2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-00		1998-99						
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	6		7		21	100	13	100	29	100	22	100					
Retained*	2		6		15	71	10	77	17	59	13	59					
Successfully completed	2		6		15	71	10	77	17	59	13	59					
Still in learning	3		1		0	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

The quality of provision

46. ISIS's support for its learners is highly effective. Training officers make themselves easily accessible to learners and respond quickly to issues raised. Learners are supplied with the mobile telephone numbers of the training officers and know that they can contact them and their call will be taken seriously. Training officers know the learners in their care well and demonstrate high levels of commitment to ensuring that they deal with their concerns. There are very regular and effective visits to learners, both during their full-time college courses and in their workplace. Visits will routinely last several hours, and at some stages of the programme, training officers will spend a productive half or full day with learners and their employer. Learners express high levels of confidence and respect for their training officers and know that they can discuss work-related and personal issues in confidence and receive impartial advice or redirection to appropriate agencies. Training officers visit learners each month in their colleges, and this provides an effective way of providing further support and guidance, and reminding learners of the ultimate aim of their studies.

47. ISIS provides good employment advice and guidance to learners during the recruitment and induction phases of their programmes. Prospective learners are given helpful advice and effective interviews during the range of recruitment events that ISIS organises. The company uses this information, along with the data from screening tests taken during the induction phase, to determine learners' interests, skills, abilities and location, so that it can match them to a selection of suitable employers. Learners are frequently offered interviews with four or five employers seeking to recruit apprentices. Many employers, impressed with the quality of learners that ISIS offers them, are now reducing their own recruitment activities. After the recruitment and assessment phase, learners attend a comprehensive induction session with ISIS before starting their college courses or employment. There are satisfactory sessions on the structure of the programme, key skills, and a challenging equality of opportunity input. There are appropriate reminders of the main points at a shorter session as learners start the second year of their programme.

48. ISIS makes particularly good use of high-quality work placements. The company's staff spend significant time in developing new contacts with employers, and nurturing those that they do have. Employers are asked to contribute to training costs. Most employers who agree to this are those that have a commitment to training. Many employers are specialist prestigious engineering companies producing high-quality engineered components. ISIS establishes highly effective partnerships with the staff within these companies. It ensures the learners' training plans are appropriate to meet the needs of the employer, learner and the skills set required by the selected apprenticeship framework. Most employers provide

learners with a broad range of hand and machining skills. Many learners work in environments where they are also required to work with designers and have to contribute to prototyping activities and discussions.

49. There are sufficient suitably qualified staff to deliver and assess the programmes. The teaching accommodation at ISIS's premises provides a suitable learning environment. The company's staff have developed their own well-produced and effective teaching materials to support the delivery and assessment of the key skills element of the training programmes. ISIS uses a range of conveniently located colleges to provide satisfactory training on the technical certificate element of the learners' programmes.

50. Progress and assessment reviews take place monthly, with most of the assessment by direct observation. ISIS monitors learners' progress effectively and targets are clear, challenging and add pace to the learning process. Many learners are ahead of their planned schedule. However, target-setting and assessment planning is short term, focusing only on the activities for the next visit. There are some useful aids to monitoring progress, such as an NVQ achievement plan, but there is little structured discussion of long-term assessment and progress activities.

51. There is insufficient diagnosis of, and formal support for, the individual needs of learners. During the induction period, learners receive an initial assessment which is effective at identifying those who require obvious support to meet a learning need. However, there is no further diagnosis of these needs to assess the level, amount or type of support required. There are no formal procedures to provide this support. Training officers do provide some regular informal support. However, because the nature of the required support has not been identified, ISIS cannot check the effect and its relevance. Some learners have also self-declared learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and numeracy problems, and some of these have not been dealt with appropriately. For example, one learner was identified with a numeracy difficulty during the initial assessment, as well as it being self-declared. Rather than dealing with the concern with appropriate support, his learning plan has been adjusted so that he will not encounter most of the numeracy elements until later in his training. In the meantime, the learner is developing a coping strategy, but it is not improving his competence or confidence with number-related issues. For some learners, further testing has taken place either at their college or by some of the larger employers. For some learners, particularly those at colleges, this has resulted in support but any record of this support, or its effect, is not routinely noted by ISIS's staff or recorded appropriately.

Leadership and management

52. Communication with most external partners is effective, and communication with the employers is particularly effective. Staff involvement and communication are also satisfactory. There are regular monthly staff and assessors' meetings, which focus on key training issues, particularly those directly relating to the learners and their programmes. The staff appraisal system is effective. It focuses on developmental issues and the staff's career plans are appropriately established in this system. ISIS pays insufficient attention to ensuring that it updates sufficiently to meet all of the company's business needs, for example, to meet the government's strategy on training for literacy, numeracy and language skills.

53. The management and delivery of key skills is satisfactory. Following identified

problems with the delivery of the key skills by subcontracted colleges, ISIS decided to plan and deliver its own provision for key skills. There has been some good development of teaching and assessment materials, coupled with a carefully planned approach to using as much work-based evidence as possible to avoid duplication of activity.

54. There is insufficient use of the learners' and employers' feedback in the development of the self-assessment report, although the process is inclusive of all staff. In addition, the process does not make adequate use of information and data to measure changes or the effect of changes in the learners' experience.

