

INSPECTION REPORT

S and B Training Ltd

03 March 2006



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
- **learn**direct 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.
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**)

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

S and B Training Ltd

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. S and B Training Ltd (S and B Training) is a work-based learning provider based in Bristol, which evolved from two group training associations under the auspices of the former Road Transport Industry Training Board. S and B Training has been providing work-based learning programmes in the motor vehicle engineering sector since 1979. It became a company limited by guarantee in 1998 and is wholly owned by Bristol Garages Group Training Limited. S and B Training achieved Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) status in November 2002. In 2003, S and B Training was awarded beacon status by the West of England Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

2. There are 474 learners on government-funded advanced apprenticeship and apprenticeship programmes for young people in light and heavy vehicle maintenance and repair, vehicle body fitting and repair, vehicle body paint operations and refinishing, and vehicle parts operations. Work-based learning for young people is funded by West of England LSC. Learners are employed in vehicle manufacturing and import, truck and car dealership, repairs, body work, bus and coach repair and maintenance, and transport distribution. They attend the S and B Training centre in central Bristol, for off-the-job training.

3. S and B Training currently employs 40 staff. There are 16 lecturers, 12 training consultants, seven management staff, three administration assistants and two learning support supervisors. About 10 per cent of the off-the-job training provision is subcontracted to City of Bristol College. This involves the training in vehicle body and paint operations. S and B Training's staff provide all the other training programmes. The company offers qualifications from several national awarding bodies and a range of commercial training for employers in the motor vehicle industry.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 2

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is good.** S and B Training's leadership and management are good, as is its approach to equality of opportunity and quality improvement. Training is good in engineering and manufacturing technologies.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** The company's arrangements for self-assessment are good. The latest self-assessment report is very descriptive and provides a good introduction to the company. It contains some critical evaluation of the programmes in the text. However, the report does not clearly identify the source of some of the strengths and weaknesses or fully explain their effect on learners. Some weaknesses are identified, but there is insufficient narrative to explain them.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.** The quality assurance arrangements are principally directed towards continuously improving the quality of training and support provided for learners. The company has

S AND B TRAINING LTD

significantly improved its service to learners and their employers throughout a demanding period of rapid business growth following the award of CoVE status. Inspection identified instances of prompt and effective responses by the company to problems that could adversely affect learners.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR S AND B TRAINING LTD:

- improve framework completion rates
- maintain improving trend of retention
- improve the co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- increase the involvement and understanding of workplace supervisors
- improve the monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- improve the effectiveness of progress reviews in the workplace

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		2

Engineering and manufacturing technologies			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Motor vehicle Apprenticeships for young people	474	2	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection reported and graded S and B Training's provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and leadership and management.

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learners interviewed	44
Number of staff interviewed	20
Number of employers interviewed	12
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	12
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	1
Number of visits	1

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

8. There is an improving trend in retention but retention is still only satisfactory. The retention rate for the 112 advanced apprentices who started in 2002-03 is currently 49 per cent. The current rates for advanced apprentices who started in 2003-04 and 2004-05 are 70 per cent and 86 per cent, respectively. The decreasing trend in the number of early leavers from the apprenticeship programme has also been maintained. The retention rate for the 53 apprentices who started in 2002-03 is 49 per cent. The current rates for apprentices who started in 2003-04 and 2004-05 are 53 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The retention rate for the current year is 98 per cent.

9. The level of achievement identified at the previous inspection as being satisfactory has been maintained. For advanced apprentices who started in 2000-01 and in 2001-02, the achievement rates were 48 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively. Achievement rates for learners on apprenticeship programmes were 44 per cent, 39 per cent and 45 per cent for the groups who started between 2000 and 2002, respectively.

10. Employers comment favourably on the learners' achievements and skills development at S and B Training. In the workplace, learners develop very good practical skills and demonstrate confidence and maturity in using tools and equipment when carrying out their work. Learners are employed by a wide range of companies that offer an extensive variety of learning opportunities and experiences. Some learners are given the opportunity to work in other sections of the business to extend their skills and knowledge.

11. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory and contain a diverse range of work-based evidence that is clearly indexed and assessed against nationally recognised standards.

The quality of provision

Grades given to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	0	7	5	0	12
Total	0	7	5	0	12

12. **Training is good throughout the apprenticeships.** The good off-the-job training identified at the previous inspection has been maintained and further improved. Off-the-job training programmes are well planned and satisfy the technical and practical requirements of the awarding bodies. In the training workshops, learners develop very good practical skills.

13. **Good on-the-job training includes a wide range of work placements in a variety of companies in the sector.** Employers include national and regional transport operators, heavy goods vehicle manufacturers, small independent body shops and garages, and large franchised dealerships.

14. All teaching and training observed was satisfactory or better. Teaching rooms are spacious and are well equipped with a variety of teaching aids. Tutors make very effective use of computer-based learning materials. Learners are provided with good handout notes and diagrams. Lesson plans are detailed.

15. **S and B Training's staff are competent in their specialist areas** of motor vehicle with up-to-date industrial knowledge and appropriate vocational awards. Many tutors have a teaching qualification or are working towards relevant qualifications.

16. **The engineering resources at the training centre are very good** and have been significantly enhanced since the previous inspection. The engineering workshops provide a modern environment which is conducive to learning. Learners are given opportunities to work on challenging and progressively complex practical tasks. Learners work on new, or nearly-new vehicles provided by major companies. Staff use an extensive range of learning resources including advanced simulator units to set problem solving tasks.

17. **In the workplace, most learners benefit from being able to use an extensive range of modern industry standard equipment** that contributes to their skills development. Employers support learners well. They help them to develop a broad range of skills and to produce good evidence for their assessment portfolios.

18. **Learners benefit from the opportunity to acquire additional qualifications that are relevant to the motor vehicle industry.** On completion of their apprenticeship, good progression opportunities are available for those who wish to move on to higher-level courses. S and B Training offers a national certificate or the higher national diploma in vehicle operations management. Between 2003 and 2005, 41 former apprentices completed these additional qualifications.

19. **Learners** who are working towards level 3 programmes in either light or heavy vehicle engineering trades **are encouraged and supported to obtain additional accreditation** above that required by their framework. To date, approximately 50 per cent of eligible

learners have progressed to this further professional qualification. In addition, some learners take a nationally recognised assessor qualification during their programme.

20. There are good enrichment activities for learners. The programmes effectively meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. First-year learners are encouraged to attend a one-week outdoor personal development activity course that promotes teamwork and helps with problem solving.

21. Learners' success and progress are well celebrated. One of S and B Training's prize-winners also gained second place in the national apprentice of the year award, which was sponsored by an awarding body and the LSC.

22. S and B Training arranges activities to promote the social development of learners. Some learners are involved in the design and manufacture of an innovative motorcycle-driven ambulance for an international aid agency. It will be used by aid agencies to transport pregnant women in isolated rural areas in Africa.

23. While learners are attending block-release training at the centre, staff organise an extensive range of evening activities for them. These include group quizzes, bowling and a series of football matches. Learners value these activities, particularly as staff participate in them as well.

24. There is good support for learners from employers and S and B Training's staff. Learners who have experienced difficulties with some of their college assignments receive extra individual support from the staff when they attend their block-release programme. Learners comment positively on the range of support given by S and B Training's staff at the training centre and in the workplace.

25. S and B Training arranges accommodation for many learners while they are at the training centre. **Good accommodation is arranged with local families.** These families are closely checked by S and B Training to ensure the welfare and safety of learners during their placements. Most learners speak very highly of their accommodation and consider it a particularly positive part of the training programme.

26. Learners are given significant financial assistance to meet their travel costs. Those travelling from various parts of the country to attend the block-release programme are provided with rail or air tickets.

27. The arrangements for assessments and progress reviews are satisfactory. Training consultants visit learners in the workplace at least every 12 weeks for progress reviews and, where appropriate, carry out assessments by direct observation. Most visits to the workplace concentrate on reviewing the technical aspect of the learners' programme with the learner and their workplace mentor. In some cases there is insufficient checking of targets from previous progress reviews.

28. The provider is currently piloting the development of an online register and monitoring system that allows employers to access information such as attendance and learners' action plans. Early indications are that the pilot system is working well.

29. Key skills are covered well at the training centre. Evidence contained in learners' key

skills portfolios is largely based on worksheet activities which are generated in the training centre. There is insufficient emphasis on the use and application of key skills in the workplace.

30. Learners receive satisfactory support for their literacy and numeracy needs. Initial assessment of learners' skills in communications, application of number and information technology (IT) is carried out at an early stage of their programme. The results of the assessments are used by the three key skills tutors to identify learners who may benefit from additional support.

31. There is insufficient co-ordination of some aspects of on- and off-the-job training.

Although comprehensive training plans are established at the start of the learners' training programme, a few employers and workplace supervisors have insufficient awareness of the training plans or the framework requirements. Opportunities to allocate specific workplace tasks to gather national vocational qualification (NVQ) evidence have not been taken.

Leadership and management

32. S and B Training's strategic and operational management of work-based learning for young people is good. Senior management have a clear and effective strategy for the expansion of the vocational training programmes. They provide good leadership with clear direction and priorities.

33. S and B Training's day-to-day management of the motor vehicle off-the-job training is good. Staff communicate effectively, dealing appropriately with operational matters and resolving problems as they arise. Learners benefit from the good management of learning programmes and the good development of training resources.

34. Since the previous inspection the company has successfully managed a significant expansion in the number of learners and employers using the company.

35. The company has expanded its operations throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, and learner numbers, currently at 474, will exceed 500 by the autumn of this year. The provider has exceeded its CoVE development plan target to increase average numbers in learning by 50 per cent. In 2002, S and B training had contact with 240 employers, which sent 120 learners to the college. S and B Training now has contact with 350 employers.

36. The very good resources at the centre have been further enhanced by the purchase of additional buildings, which provide the main learning areas of light and vehicle engineering with their own specialist facilities. In August 2006, S and B Training will open new premises for vehicle body repair and paint training, which will accommodate all off-the-job training in those trades.

37. The particularly effective links that S and B Training has with companies in the motor vehicle industry have been further developed and strengthened. S and B Training continues to have an excellent reputation in the sector for delivering good training.

38. Five major national motor vehicle companies are using S and B Training exclusively to train all their apprentices. Most of S and B Training's board of directors comprises people

from the local motor industry. They provide up-to-date knowledge of the needs of local and national motor vehicle companies.

39. S and B Training's staff have worked closely and very successfully with national training organisations and have contributed to the development of higher-level national qualifications in motor vehicle studies for managers in the motor industry. Working closely with awarding bodies, S and B Training has also designed new motor vehicle NVQs, including the associated teaching schemes, assignments and online tests.

40. S and B Training has established very effective partnerships with other educational institutions. In parallel with its development of the apprenticeship programme, the company takes an active and leading part in developing partnerships with local stakeholders and training providers in the Southwest. S and B Training, in partnership with four other providers, has created a provider network. In its first year, the network has worked closely with regional schools to promote careers in the motor vehicle industry. The network has been successful in securing LSC funding for improving the achievement and retention of learners from under-represented groups in work-based learning.

41. S and B Training gives a high priority to staff training and development. Vacancies have been created by the rapid expansion of the programmes and the company has now been successful in filling them. All new staff have recent relevant industrial experience and many have additional qualifications in training. Staff induction programmes are well planned. Staff training and development, particularly for lecturers and training consultants is good.

42. Staff have a good understanding of their roles in the company and are encouraged to initiate new teaching and learning methods, and to share good practice. The arrangements for staff appraisal are now satisfactory.

43. Internal communications are good. Regular departmental meetings take place and they are linked to other departmental agendas. Designated staff have become linked to major national contracts and this has improved communication and working relationships and deals more effectively with any day-to-day concerns.

44. The promotion of equality and diversity for young work-based learners is good. The company promotes training opportunities very effectively through a wide range of activities across all sections of the community.

45. The company has produced leaflets which describe their apprenticeship scheme. They are available in several languages and are appropriate for local minority ethnic groups. These promotional materials contain images of learners from under-represented groups and are also used by staff at local careers events.

46. The provider has placed a particular emphasis on promoting its programme in local areas of social deprivation. Management staff have made very effective links through the local training provider network to access specialist guidance in working with local centres for the black and minority ethnic population, and have been successful in obtaining additional funding from the LSC.

47. There is very good monitoring and regular reinforcement of equality of opportunity

at the training centre. The induction programme for learners includes an effective half-day session on equality of opportunity. Their awareness and understanding is raised during group discussions and through videos displaying situations which are relevant to young apprentices. Learners can recall clearly their induction training on equality and diversity.

48. S and B Training has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and consistency across its training programmes. Staff are particularly skilled at developing techniques and documents to improve the operational aspects of training, and are involved in the development of online and multimedia training.

49. **The provider has a clear strategy for quality assurance.** It identifies the commitment to provide good training for the learners in its sector.

50. **The quality assurance arrangements are good** and are principally directed towards continuously improving the quality of training and support for learners. The company has significantly improved its service to learners and their employers throughout a demanding period of rapid business growth following the award of CoVE status.

51. The company responds quickly and decisively when dealing with issues that affect the quality of its service and products, particularly if they have an adverse effect on learners. For example, S and B Training identified problems in vehicle body and paint training and took decisive action to resolve the shortfall by initially transferring to another subcontractor, while funding and equipping its own training centre at Bristol. This is scheduled to open in August 2006.

52. S and B Training is working very closely and successfully with major national companies. It holds regular meetings with the employers' key engineering and training staff to monitor the effectiveness of the training programmes. Employers value the close working relationship between themselves and S and B Training and the benefits their learners derive from the continuously improving training arrangements.

53. **The company's arrangements for self-assessment are good.** The company has produced a self-assessment report every year since 1998, and the latest was published in February 2006. The company used feedback from employers, learners and other key stakeholders in the sector when compiling the report. The company also used support and guidance from external consultants.

54. Learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities is satisfactory and they clearly know what action should be taken if they consider that they are receiving unfair treatment. There is a particularly good level of mutual respect between staff and learners at the company's training centre. Learners consider that they are treated well at all stages of their training.

55. The provider has allocated a private classroom as a prayer room for three half-hourly sessions each day.

56. S and B Training's staff take particular care to ensure the wellbeing of learners who are staying away from home during the block training at the centre. The provider has established a good network of local families who welcome learners and treat them extremely well.

57. The provider has recently taken steps to improve accessibility to the training centre's facilities for people with restricted mobility, following a recent external audit.

58. In general, the use of management information is satisfactory across all areas of the provider. It is used particularly well to analyse, forecast and to set realistic and achievable targets for recruitment, and for identifying trends in learners' success and retention. The company is introducing a more comprehensive global monitoring database which will detail every element of the learners' progress.

59. The arrangements for the initial assessment of literacy and numeracy support needs of learners are satisfactory. Additional needs are assessed at induction and the results are analysed and used to identify learners who may need additional support for key skills and other parts of the training programme. S and B Training ensures that where appropriate the required support is provided. However, in some instances the information has not been passed to tutors.

60. **Insufficient action has been taken to monitor equality of opportunity for learners in the workplace.** The provider recognised that there were no formal arrangements for staff to monitor equality procedures in the workplace, and a revised progress review form has been developed. It prompts the training consultants to ask questions relating to learners' treatment in the workplace.

61. **There is insufficient quality assurance of workplace reviews and assessment.** The internal verification of assessment is satisfactory, but some assessment at work is not planned or analysed sufficiently to ensure that learners can cover all aspects of the qualification. Progress monitoring does not sufficiently identify the elements of the qualification that learners will have difficulty obtaining evidence for.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good management of learning
- good management of expansion in vocational training
- particularly effective links with external organisations
- good staff development
- good range of initiatives to promote training opportunities
- good action to improve the off-the-job training

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- insufficient action to quality assure workplace reviews

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Motor vehicle

Strengths

- improving retention rates
- good training
- very good resources
- good progression and career development
- good enrichment activities for learners
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

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

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT S AND B TRAINING LTD:

- the practical work
- the well-organised training
- the good training resources
- the good training and excellent tutors
- 'learning much more than I did at the other college'
- 'tutors who are all good down-to-earth people, not like those at school'
- 'that there is always someone to help you'
- 'tutors who are easy to get on with' - 'so we give and get respect from each other'
- 'that there are no bullies'
- 'the good help and support I get from S and B Training and at work'
- 'coming to the centre and getting a change from work'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK S AND B TRAINING LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- key skills - 'they are too much like school'
- the information on NVQs - 'it could be clearer'
- provide a monitoring chart for work
- the amount of written work - 'there should be less'
- the textbook references in the course workbook
- the common room
- the lockers for overalls, coats and shoes
- the time on electrics and electronics - 'this should be less'
- the block-training sessions - 'they should all be one-week long'
- more 'hands-on' practical work

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 2

Strengths

- good management of learning
- good management of expansion in vocational training
- particularly effective links with external organisations
- good staff development
- good range of initiatives to promote training opportunities
- good action to improve the off-the-job training

Weaknesses

- insufficient monitoring of equality of opportunity in the workplace
- insufficient action to quality assure workplace reviews

62. S and B Training's strategic and operational management of work-based learning for young people is good. Senior management have a clear and effective strategy for the expansion of the vocational training programmes. Senior managers promote the company's vision and values, and encourage high standards of practice for staff and learners. They provide good leadership with clear direction and priorities. Senior managers value the contribution that staff make to the organisation and give staff training a particularly high priority. Staff have a good understanding of their roles in the company and are encouraged to initiate innovative teaching and assessment methods. S and B Training's day-to-day management of the motor vehicle off-the-job training is good. Staff communicate effectively as a team, dealing appropriately with operational matters and resolving problems as they arise. Learners benefit from the good management of programmes and the good development of training resources.

63. S and B Training has been very successful in its management of the expansion of its provision since the previous inspection. The company has expanded its operations throughout the whole of the UK, and learner numbers, currently at 474, will exceed 500 by the autumn of 2006. The provider has exceeded its CoVE development plan target to increase average numbers in learning by 50 per cent. Much of the growth has been achieved through increased employer engagement. In 2002, S and B Training had contact with 240 employers who sent 120 learners to the college. S and B Training now has contact with 350 employers. It has made significant enhancements to the training programmes and has introduced a wide range of additional learning opportunities. The expansion has been matched with good use of the trade's training facilities. The very good resources at the centre have been further enhanced by purchasing additional buildings which provide the main learning areas of light and vehicle engineering with their own specialist facilities. In August 2006, S and B Training will open new premises for vehicle body repair and paint training which will accommodate all off-the-job training in those trades.

64. The particularly effective links that S and B Training has with companies in the motor

vehicle industry have been further developed and strengthened. S and B Training continues to have an excellent reputation in the sector for delivering good training. Since the previous inspection several additional national companies in the heavy vehicle and passenger transport industry have transferred all their apprenticeship training programmes to S and B Training. Five major national motor vehicle companies are using S and B Training exclusively to train all their apprentices. Most of S and B Training's board of directors comprises people from the local motor industry. They provide up-to-date knowledge of the needs of local and national motor vehicle companies. S and B Training has been very successful in ensuring that the curriculum closely matches employers' needs by introducing well-designed training programmes which have been developed for individual major employers.

65. S and B Training's staff have worked closely and very successfully with national training organisations, contributing to the development of higher-level national qualifications in motor vehicle studies for managers in the motor industry. Working closely with awarding bodies, S and B Training has also designed new motor vehicle NVQs, including the associated teaching schemes, assignments and online tests. These NVQs were introduced to all motor vehicle apprentices from September 2005. S and B Training's staff have developed a revised national certificate qualification, to replace the current national diploma and which incorporates application of number and IT. The company is continuing its development of a range of innovative learning materials to promote the use of e-learning across the sector.

66. S and B Training has established very effective partnerships with other educational institutions. In parallel with its development of the apprenticeship programme, the company takes a leading part in developing partnerships with local stakeholders and training providers in the Southwest. In partnership with four other providers, S and B Training has created a provider network and in its first year it has worked closely with regional schools to promote careers in the motor vehicle industry. The network has been successful in securing LSC funding for improving the achievement and retention of learners from under-represented groups in work-based learning.

67. S and B Training gives a high priority to staff training and development. Staff vacancies were created by the rapid expansion of the programmes and these have now been filled. All new staff have recent relevant industrial experience and many have additional qualifications in training. Staff inductions are well planned. Staff training and development, particularly for lecturers and training consultants is good. Staff benefit from good continuing professional development, which is particularly focused on teaching and learning. External consultants are brought in to help staff maintain their professional development targets and occupational competence. Staff attend manufacturers' courses, some of which are provided by S and B Training's national employers and are used to maintain the high level of occupational competence of all staff. Staff have a good understanding of their roles in the company and are encouraged to initiate new teaching and learning methods, and to share good practice. The arrangements for staff appraisal are now satisfactory. With two changes of chief executive in the past 18 months, the staff appraisal system had fallen behind schedule. Senior staff have recently received external training on staff appraisal and a more suitable system has been introduced.

68. Internal communications are good. Managers recognise that the rapid expansion of the company has highlighted the need to improve communication to ensure

standardisation and further improve the quality of the provision across all departments. A co-ordination structure has been implemented to bring more effective control to the key areas of the business. Regular departmental meetings take place and these are now being linked to other departmental agendas. The co-ordination between individual departmental meetings and senior management meetings has improved in the past year with more regular senior meetings and a coherent approach to redeveloping many of the procedures. Designated staff are now linked to major national contracts and this has improved communication and working relationships.

69. In general, the use of management information is satisfactory across all areas of the provider. It is used particularly well to analyse, forecast and to set realistic and achievable overall targets for recruitment, and for identifying trends in learners' success and retention. The analysis of management information is used effectively to support the quality control of many areas of the training programmes, such as the frequency and planned dates of progress reviews and health and safety checks. However, in some instances, management information is not well understood or shared sufficiently. This makes it difficult for individuals to understand their contribution to overall quality and achievement. Course lecturers are sometimes unaware of the success rates in their area or in comparison with others. The company is introducing a more comprehensive global monitoring database which details every element of learners' progress.

70. The arrangements for the initial assessment of additional support needs are satisfactory. All learners are assessed at induction and the results are analysed and used to identify learners who need additional support for key skills and other parts of the training programme. S and B Training ensures that, where appropriate, support is provided. However, in some instances the information has not been passed to tutors.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 2

71. S and B Training's promotion of equality and diversity for young work-based learners is good. The company promotes training opportunities very effectively through a wide range of activity across all sections of the community. Managers have fully accepted that, despite its increased recruitment effort in recent years to attract learners from under-represented groups, there is additional work to be done. Current representation of women is 1.7 per cent, and of non-white learners is 3.4 per cent. The proportion of the population that is non-white, according to the 2001 census, is 9.1 per cent nationally and 8.2 per cent in the Bristol urban district. The new prospectus features several images of women and learners from minority ethnic groups. S and B Training has produced leaflets which describe its apprenticeship programme and they are available in several languages. The promotional materials are used at local careers events. The provider has placed a particular emphasis on promoting the programmes in local areas of social deprivation. Management staff have made very effective links through the local training provider network to access specialist guidance in working with local centres for the black and minority ethnic population.

72. Since the previous inspection, S and B Training has improved and simplified its equality of opportunity statement so that it is more meaningful to learners and staff. The statement now places a particular emphasis on valuing diversity. The induction programme for all learners includes an effective half-day session on equality of opportunity. The awareness and understanding of learners is raised during group discussions and through videos displaying situations which are relevant to young apprentices. Learners can recall clearly their induction on equality and diversity. Learners' understanding of their rights and

responsibilities is satisfactory. Learners clearly know what action should be taken if they consider that they are receiving unfair treatment. Relevant procedures are clearly reinforced in the learners' handbook. There is a particularly good level of mutual respect between staff and learners at the training centre. Learners consider that they are treated well at all stages of their training. Many of the walls in the training centre display large posters of learners from diverse backgrounds. One relatively private classroom has been allocated as a prayer room for three half-hourly sessions each day. Consultation was made with a local Muslim cultural society to identify special needs of a Muslim learner who was to be placed with a local family.

73. S and B Training's staff take particular care to ensure the wellbeing of learners who are staying away from home during the block training at the centre. Care is taken to check that the selected lodging accommodation meets their needs. The provider has established a good network of local families who welcome learners and treat them extremely well. Staff who manage and administer the accommodation scheme are readily available to learners if they have concerns.

74. The provider has recently taken steps to improve accessibility to the training centre's facilities for people with restricted mobility. An audit of the buildings was carried out in December 2005 by an external organisation. Some effective remedial action has been taken, and further action includes providing access to resources currently on the upper floor of some buildings, allocation of appropriate car parking spaces and upgrading the toilet facilities.

75. While there is very good monitoring and regular reinforcement of equality of opportunity at the training centre, there has been less action taken to monitor equality in the workplace. At the start of an apprenticeship the employer is asked to sign an agreement that includes reference to its implementation of an equal opportunities policy. Until recently staff have not been routinely checking the employers' equal opportunities arrangements. The provider recognised that there were no formal arrangements for staff to monitor equality procedures in the workplace. A revised progress review form has been developed and this prompts the training consultants to ask questions relating to learners' treatment in the workplace. The current job description for training consultants identifies responsibility for monitoring health and safety in the workplace, but there is no reference to equality of opportunity. Training consultants are well aware of their role in preventing harassment and bullying and its importance in the welfare of young learners.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 2

76. S and B Training has a strong commitment to continuous improvement and consistency across its training programmes. Staff are particularly skilled at developing techniques and documents to improve the operational aspects of training, and are involved in the development of online and multimedia learning. The company responds quickly and effectively to requests from employers, learners and staff for more flexible learning. Staff use new resources successfully to introduce learners to advanced technologies which, for those learners from smaller companies, are sometimes better than those available in the workplace. The company is increasingly making good use of learner surveys and the analysis of the end-of-block test results to identify areas for improvement in the provision.

77. The senior management team has overall responsibility for quality assurance of the provision. All staff are involved in implementing and promoting the quality assurance

arrangements. There are regular meetings across the organisation to discuss quality assurance. S and B Training has a clear quality assurance strategy that sets out its commitment to provide quality training for the learners in its sector. The company has specified a number of objectives to improve the company's performance, such as reducing the early leaver rate, increasing the recruitment of learners from under-represented groups, additional staff development and curriculum management. These objectives are reinforced by the company's quality policy. The company has a quality assurance manual which describes its operational procedures and contains an audit schedule. The company uses ISO 9000/2000, an international quality assurance standard, to monitor its compliance with its key business procedures. The company is also accredited with the Investors in People standard, which is a national standard for improving an organisation's performance through its people.

78. The quality assurance arrangements are good and principally directed towards continuously improving the quality of training and support for learners. The company has significantly improved its service to learners and their employers throughout a demanding period of rapid business growth. Following its recognition as a CoVE, S and B Training has increased extensively the range of vocational programmes it offers and the number of learners. It has responded well to radical changes in the modern apprenticeship framework in the motor vehicle sector by offering innovative training solutions to employers.

79. The company responds quickly and decisively when dealing with concerns which affect the quality of its service and products, particularly if they have an adverse effect on learners. For example, S and B Training identified problems with its previous subcontractor for vehicle body and paint training, which was unable to satisfy the required standard of training. It took decisive action to resolve the shortfall by initially transferring to another subcontractor while funding and equipping its own training centre in Bristol, which is scheduled to open in August 2006. S and B Training was concerned at proposed changes to standards and qualifications in the sector. The company ensured that the needs of the industry and its learners were fully taken into account by its participation in a range of national committees and working parties. S and B Training continues to be concerned by the number of learners nationally leaving motor vehicle programmes very early. It revised its arrangements for recruitment with the objective of reducing the rate of early leavers from the programme. The retention of learners has improved following the introduction of the new procedures.

80. S and B Training is working very closely and successfully with major national companies. It holds regular meetings with the employers' key engineering and training staff to monitor the effectiveness of the training programmes. These meetings are well attended by employers and include engineering managers and human relations personnel. These arrangements provide a very effective forum for dealing with problems relating to the performance of the programmes and for contributing to quality improvement. Employers value close working relationship between themselves and S and B Training and the benefits their learners derive from the continuously improving training arrangements.

81. The company's arrangements for self-assessment are good. The company has produced a self-assessment report every year since 1998, the latest of which was published in February 2006. The company used feedback from employers, learners and other key stakeholders when compiling the report. The company also used support and guidance from external consultants. The current self-assessment report is very descriptive and

provides a good introduction to the company. It also contains some critical evaluation of the programmes. However, the report does not clearly identify the source of some of the strengths and weaknesses or fully explain their effect on learners. Weaknesses are identified, but in some instances there is insufficient narrative to explain them. Many of the strengths in the self-assessment report have also been identified by inspectors, but others are no more than practice.

82. There is insufficient quality assurance of workplace reviews and assessment. The internal verification of assessment is satisfactory, but some assessment at work is not planned or analysed sufficiently to ensure that learners can cover all aspects of the qualification. Progress monitoring does not identify the parts of the qualification that learners will have difficulty gaining evidence for. Insufficient development of key skills at work was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection. Despite additional training and guidance from the provider, a few employers still do not fully understand the importance of key skills as an integral part of the NVQ.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Motor vehicle Apprenticeships for young people	474	2

83. S and B Training has 474 learners in motor vehicle engineering, of whom 368 are advanced apprentices and 106 are apprentices. Learners work towards a variety of NVQs and technical certificates at level 2 and 3 in vehicle maintenance and repair (light and heavy vehicle options), body repair and paint operations, vehicle electrical and parts personnel training. The heavy vehicle programmes, which include bus and coach training, comprise 52 per cent of the total training provision.

84. The company recruits learners locally in the Southwest and nationally through referrals from employers or Connexions, and through its own promotional activities. Learners are asked to attend selection tests and then interviews with S and B Training and employers, to determine the most appropriate vocational option and level of qualification for them.

85. All learners are employed by automotive companies, which include some major manufacturers, national bus and coach operators, national heavy goods vehicle operators, franchised main dealerships and light and heavy service and repair garages. Approximately 50 per cent of learners come from the Southwest region, and the remainder come from across the whole of England and Scotland. At the beginning of their apprenticeships, learners attend a one-week induction programme followed by block-release off-the-job training at the S and B Training centre workshops, called the Isambard Kingdom College, in central Bristol. Currently, 29 learners in the second and third years of vehicle body and repair frameworks are receiving off-the-job training at City of Bristol College, to complete their vehicle body repair programme. All recent learners who have started vehicle body repair programmes and are currently receiving on-the-job training, will have all their off-the-job training in the new training facility at S and B Training, which is scheduled to open in August 2006.

86. All staff are occupationally qualified and 11 are training for assessor or verifier awards.

Motor vehicle

Strengths

- improving retention rates
- good training
- very good resources
- good progression and career development
- good enrichment activities for learners
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

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

Achievement and standards

87. There is an improving trend in retention, but retention is still only satisfactory. The provider recognised at the previous inspection that a significant number of learners were leaving programmes very early for a variety of reasons. It modified its selection procedures and introduced revised monitoring arrangements. The changes decreased the number of learners leaving programmes early and the trend has been maintained since then. Of the 112 advanced apprentices who started in 2002-03, the retention rate is currently 49 per cent. The current rates for advanced apprentices who started in 2003-04 and 2004-05 are 70 per cent and 86 per cent, respectively. Similarly, the decrease in the number of early leavers from the apprenticeship programme has also been maintained. Retention rates for the 53 apprentices who started in 2002-03 was 49 per cent. The current rates for apprentices who started in 2003-04 and 2004-05 are 53 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The retention rate for apprentices who started in 2005-06 is currently 98 per cent.

88. The satisfactory achievement rates identified at the previous inspection have been maintained. For advanced apprentices who started in 2000-01 and 2001-02, the achievement rates were 48 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively. Achievement rates for apprentices were 44 per cent, 39 per and 45 per cent for the groups who started between 2000 and 2002, respectively.

89. Employers comment favourably on the achievement levels and the skills learners develop at S and B Training. After comparing achievement rates across a number of motor vehicle providers nationally, some major national transport companies have transferred all their apprentices to S and B Training.

90. In the workplace, learners develop very good practical skills and demonstrate confidence and maturity in using tools and equipment when carrying out their work. Learners are employed by a wide range of companies that offer an extensive variety of learning opportunities and experiences. Some learners, particularly in larger companies, are given the opportunity to work in other sections of the business such as construction site plant maintenance, mobile breakdown repair and sales, and this extends their skills and knowledge.

91. Learners' portfolios are satisfactory and contain a diverse range of work-based evidence that is clearly indexed and assessed against nationally recognised standards.

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						
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Number of starts	137		161		160	100	112	100	172	100	90	100					
Retained*	0		0		19	12	55	49	118	69	51	57					
Successfully completed	0		0		19	12	51	46	105	61	43	48					
Still in learning	134		139		92	57	3	3	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		2000-01					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	49		50		73	100	53	100	51	100	64	100				
Retained*	0		1		28	38	26	49	27	53	34	53				
Successfully completed	0		1		20	27	24	45	20	39	28	44				
Still in learning	48		39		19	26	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

92. Training is good for the apprentices. The good off-the-job training identified at the previous inspection has been maintained and further improved. Off-the-job training programmes are well planned and very effectively satisfy the technical and practical requirements of the awarding bodies. In the training workshops, learners develop very good practical skills. S and B Training's staff are highly competent in their specialist areas of motor vehicle studies. All tutors have up-to-date industrial knowledge and appropriate vocational awards. Many have a teaching qualification or are working towards relevant qualifications. They monitor and guide learners through a well-structured programme of challenging and progressively more complex practical exercises. Staff use a range of challenging exercises to reinforce learners' understanding of each topic. All teaching and training observed was satisfactory or better. Teaching rooms are spacious and are well equipped with a variety of teaching aids. Tutors make very effective use of computer-based learning materials. Learners are provided with good handout notes and diagrams. Lesson plans are detailed and attendance rates are good. However, in a few sessions, tutors use passive forms of teaching and do not make sufficient use of learners' experience. Teaching and mentoring staff give constructive and carefully considered advice.

93. Good on-the-job training takes place in a wide range of work placements with a variety of companies in the sector. Employers include national and regional transport operators, heavy goods vehicle manufacturers, small independent body shops and garages, and large franchised dealerships. Employers support learners and help them to develop a broad range of skills and produce good evidence for their assessment portfolios. S and B Training's staff and employers work well together whenever there is a limited range of activities in a particular work area, to gain suitable experience. All learners are assigned to

experienced mentors who monitor the development of their skills. Employers that work directly with learners are knowledgeable and possess relevant occupational experience, and are keen to contribute to the learning process through witness testimony.

94. The engineering resources at the training centre are very good and have been significantly enhanced since the previous inspection. The engineering workshops provide a modern environment which is conducive to learning. Learners are given opportunities to work on challenging and progressively more complex practical tasks. Learners work on new, or nearly-new, vehicles provided by major companies. The experienced staff use an extensive range of learning resources, including advanced simulator units to set problem solving tasks. Such equipment provides learners with good assessment opportunities to confirm their understanding of various systems. These rigs can also be linked to advanced test equipment for testing and developing circuits for learners' projects. In the workplace, most learners benefit from an extensive range of modern industry standard equipment that contributes to their skills development. Learners develop their knowledge and practical skills to a high level.

95. Learners benefit from the opportunity to acquire additional qualifications that are relevant to the motor vehicle industry. On completion of their apprenticeship, good progression opportunities are available for learners who wish to move on to higher-level courses. S and B Training offers a national certificate and the higher national diploma in vehicle operations management. Between 2003 and 2005, 41 former apprentices successfully completed such additional qualifications. Learners who complete level 3 programmes in either light or heavy vehicle engineering trades, are encouraged and supported to obtain additional qualifications. S and B Training is one of a small number of approved assessment centres that is licensed to offer a range of professional accreditation that assures current competence in the safe maintenance and repair of vehicles. To date, approximately 50 per cent of eligible learners have progressed to this further professional qualification. In addition, some learners take a nationally recognised assessor qualification during their programme.

96. There are good enrichment activities for learners. The programmes effectively meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. First-year learners are encouraged to attend a one-week outdoor personal development activity course. The course promotes teamwork, helps with problem solving and provides a range of outdoor activities. At the annual prize-giving, success and progress are well celebrated. One of S and B Training's prize winners also gained second place in the national apprentice of the year award scheme sponsored by an awarding body and the LSC. The learner was nominated because of their willingness to help others, their contribution towards group activities and demonstration of leadership qualities. S and B Training arranges activities to promote the social development of learners. Some learners are involved in the design and manufacture of an innovative motorcycle-driven ambulance which will be used by aid agencies to transport pregnant women in isolated rural areas in Africa. This work is on behalf of an international aid agency. While learners are attending block-release training at the centre, staff arrange an extensive range of evening activities for them. These include group quizzes, bowling and a series of football matches. Learners value these activities particularly because staff participate in them as well.

97. There is good support for learners from employers and S and B Training's staff. Learners who have experienced difficulties with some of their college assignments have

received individual support from the staff when they attend their block-release programme. The learners are given the telephone numbers of the tutors and training consultants and are encouraged to contact them if they have problems. Employers support their learners and give them assistance and encouragement. Action includes resolving attitude and motivation problems through effective consultation with learners and parents. Learners comment positively on the range of support given by S and B Training's staff at the training centre and in the workplace.

98. S and B Training arranges accommodation for many learners while they are at the training centre on block release. Good accommodation is arranged with local families who are closely checked to ensure the welfare and safety of learners during their placements. Before the family homes are approved, the accommodation is inspected and the local travel arrangements are checked. Most learners speak very highly of their accommodation and consider it a particularly positive part of the training programme. Learners who travel from various parts of the country to attend their block-release programme are provided with rail or air tickets. In some cases, the host family transport learners to and from rail or air terminals. Learners who live locally and travel to the college for their block-release training are given significant financial assistance with their travel costs.

99. The arrangements for assessments and progress reviews are satisfactory. Training consultants visit learners in the workplace at least every 12 weeks for progress reviews and, where appropriate, carry out assessments by direct observation. Most visits to the workplace concentrate on reviewing the technical aspect of the learners' programme with the learner and their workplace mentor. However, in some cases there is insufficient checking of targets from previous progress reviews. Some reviews have the same targets as the previous review. Targets are not always sufficiently focused or time dependent and effective. Although learners' understanding of health and safety and welfare is checked during reviews, there is insufficient emphasis on the formal recording of these aspects on the review forms. The provider is currently piloting the development of an online register and monitoring system which allows employers access to information such as attendance and action plans. Early indications are that the pilot system is working well.

100. Key skills are covered well at the training centre. Learners receive satisfactory support for their literacy and numeracy needs. Initial assessment of learners' skills in communications, application of number and IT is carried out at an early stage of their programme. The results of the assessments are used by the three key skills tutors to identify those who may benefit from additional support. Several key skills development sessions are supported by two staff from the key skills team. One member concentrates on giving additional support to specific learners in the group. Information on learners' literacy and numeracy needs and their progress is not adequately communicated to technical tutors and assessors. Evidence in learners' key skills portfolios is largely based around worksheet activities generated in the training centre. There is insufficient emphasis on the use and application of key skills in the workplace.

101. There is insufficient co-ordination of some aspects of on- and off-the-job training. Although comprehensive training plans are established at the start of the training programme, a few employers and workplace supervisors are not fully aware of the training plans or the framework requirements. Learners are provided with a detailed action plan at the end of each off-the-job training block, which describes the type and range of evidence to be collected before their next attendance. However, in some instances, employers are

not fully aware of what practical tasks need to be completed in the workplace and some opportunities have not been taken to allocate specific workplace tasks to gather this evidence.

Leadership and management

102. S and B Training's day-to-day management of the motor vehicle off-the-job training is good. Staff communicate effectively as a team and deal appropriately with operational matters as they arise. Regular course team and curriculum team meetings are held and minutes are taken, including a review of previously agreed action points. Effective use is made of electronic communications to ensure that all staff are kept informed on appropriate matters. Communications between staff and City of Bristol College and employers are good. S and B Training's senior managers continue to provide good leadership and vigorous promotion of the company's vision and values. Senior managers value the contribution that staff make to the organisation and give staff training a high priority. Staff have a good understanding of their roles in the company and are encouraged to initiate innovative teaching and assessment methods.

103. Staff recognise that although management information systems are used very effectively to identify a range of operational and performance issues, they make insufficient use of data to aid decision-making. S and B Training has identified this in its development plan. Internal verification is satisfactory. However, not all planned assessment sampling has been carried out.

