

INSPECTION REPORT

Paignton Sec Info Tech Training Centre

27 October 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*

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Paignton Sec Info Tech Training Centre Limited (PSIT) is based in Paignton in Devon, and also has a training centre in Newton Abbot. PSIT became a limited company in 2002, but has been operating for over 40 years, originally under the name of Paignton Secretarial College. There are 17 members of staff, three of whom are employed part time. The principal and vice-principal are the daughter and son of the previous owner of the company.

2. PSIT has a contract with Devon and Cornwall Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for work-based learning for young people. This currently covers 55 apprentices and two learners working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) in administration, ten learners working towards NVQs in management, and seven learners on pre-apprenticeship programmes. It also covers nine customer service apprentices and three information and communications technology (ICT) apprentices, but there are too few of these for them to be inspected separately.

3. PSIT is a subcontractor to three organisations that hold contracts for co-financed LSC and European Social Fund (ESF) projects. The contracts are held by Dartington Tech, South West Tourism and Enterprise South Devon. All but one of the contracts are to provide NVQ training in management in the workplace. One hundred and sixteen learners are working towards management NVQs, 106 of whom are on subcontracted provision.

4. PSIT also has a learndirect contract which has operated since August, and holds a contract jointly funded by the LSC and the ESF called Better Business through Computers. This project is intended to help small and medium-sized businesses improve their business skills by developing their use of computers, and some of the learners move on to NVQs linked to their business needs.

5. In addition, a number of learners are taking assessors awards. PSIT also offers a range of privately funded provision, predominantly in ICT, and provides management training for a local health care trust. Until September 2005, it also held contracts with Jobcentre Plus.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

Grade 3

6. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** PSIT's leadership and management are satisfactory as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Arrangements for equality of opportunity are inadequate. In business administration and law the provision is good.

7. **The inspection team had some confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** PSIT involves staff in the self-assessment process and collects feedback from employers. However, the self-assessment report is not self-critical and does not provide an accurate evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

8. The provider has demonstrated that it has sufficient capacity to make improvements. Some actions have been taken that have improved the quality of provision. However, PSIT does not have a coherent strategy for quality improvement and proposed actions do not include specific details and realistic timescales.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PAIGNTON SEC INFO TECH TRAINING CENTRE:

- continue to develop management information systems
- produce and implement a formal strategy and action plan for equality of opportunity
- implement quality improvement processes
- improve the monitoring of learners' progress
- develop and implement strategies to speed up learners' achievement

GRADES

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

Leadership and management		3
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		4
Quality improvement		3

Business administration and law			2
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade	
Administration		2	
Apprenticeships for young people	55	2	
Other government-funded provision	9	None	
NVQ training for young people	1	None	
Business management		3	
Other government-funded provision	116	3	

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

9. Two contributory areas in business administration and law were graded and reported on. These were administration and business management. Evidence was examined from the other areas of learning to support judgements in the key findings section of the report.

Number of inspectors	4
Number of inspection days	16
Number of learners interviewed	26
Number of staff interviewed	21
Number of employers interviewed	12
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	24
Number of partners/external agencies interviewed	3

KEY FINDINGS

Achievements and standards

10. **Retention rates for administration apprentices are good.** In the past three years, all but five apprentices and two advanced apprentices have been retained for the planned duration of their programme.

11. **There is good development of learners' confidence and skills on management NVQ programmes.** Several learners had not received any formal education or training since leaving school. Some lacked confidence before starting the programme, but their self-esteem has improved during their training.

12. Framework achievement rates are satisfactory, but many learners do not achieve their framework until after the expected date.

13. The management NVQ programme is relatively new and it is too early to make judgements on achievement rates. The standard of learners' work is satisfactory.

14. Many learners achieve additional qualifications in ICT.

The quality of provision

15. Administration apprentices have access to **flexible training opportunities**. Workshop sessions are available during the day and for one evening a week at each training centre. A 10-week programme of training for the technical certificate is offered during the daytime. Additional qualifications are available to apprentices, and many of these qualifications fill skills gaps and aid employability. Key skills are taught to individual learners in the workplace or at workshop sessions.

16. **Assessment practice is generally good, especially in administration provision.**

Assessors visit the workplace at least monthly, and use appropriate assessment methods that meet individual learners' needs and the requirements of the qualification. Learners can arrange an assessment at any time with their assessor. Learners on administration apprenticeships are given clear written feedback on their attainment and are left with a detailed action plan. Assessment practice is less consistent on the management programmes and some learners do not understand what they have achieved and what they need to do for their next assessment visit.

17. Learners on administration programmes have good progression opportunities. All learners have the opportunity to progress through the various levels of business administration or on to alternative courses, for example in accounting or law.

18. There is good responsiveness to local employers' needs in the management NVQ provision. Employers use the NVQ to benefit their businesses.

19. Progress reviews at PSIT are generally ineffective and do not generate clear and specific targets for action. Individual learning plans are not completed fully, do not include timescales and are not updated with changes of programme.

20. Staff do not make it sufficiently clear to learners on the management programmes what they need to do to progress. The provision is new, and the boundaries of PSIT's and the contract holders' responsibilities are still being clarified. Many of the staff involved are new and are acquiring the skills and confidence to fulfil their roles effectively.

Leadership and management

21. The management of the curriculum areas is satisfactory. The provision in administration is well established and the team members work well together. In business management, there are inconsistencies in practice, and ways of working are not standardised or formalised enough to ensure that learners make appropriate progress.

22. PSIT has **good partnership links**, in particular with providers that subcontract to PSIT. Partners are complimentary about the effectiveness of communications with PSIT and see it as a co-operative organisation which can fulfil its part of the contract.

23. PSIT provides good opportunities for staff to gain external qualifications. Individual staff development needs are identified at annual appraisal meetings and linked to organisational priorities. Current staff development priorities include health and safety, NVQs, and qualifications in teaching, and literacy and numeracy support.

24. PSIT provides **good individual support for learners.** Staff are available outside office hours. Suitable arrangements are made to adapt equipment and facilities to meet individual needs. Learners with additional support needs are well supported.

25. The internal verification system is adequate. The schedule of portfolio verification is linked to appropriate feedback to assessors. Standardisation meetings take place three times a year and internal verification training workshops ensure that new and existing staff are updated in their assessment practice.

26. The management information system is inadequate. It is in the process of being

developed and a number of separate spreadsheets and databases are currently in use. It is not used to produce regular reports for managers and there is no analysis of trends or intakes to provide an overview of the provision or of learners' progress.

27. **The management and promotion of equality of opportunity is inadequate.** PSIT has no action plan to promote equality of opportunity and few relevant policies and procedures. Marketing materials are not user-friendly or targeted at under-represented groups. There is insufficient focus on ensuring that learners and staff have a good understanding of equal opportunities issues.

28. There is **insufficient formal monitoring of quality improvement.** The quality improvement policy is brief and non-specific. The effectiveness of quality improvement measures is not systematically monitored.

29. The self-assessment process involves all staff and includes feedback from employers. However, it is not sufficiently self-critical and fails to accurately identify the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good partnership links
- effective staff development leading to external qualifications
- good individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information system
- inadequate management and promotion of equal opportunities
- insufficient formal monitoring of quality improvement

Business administration and law

Administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates
- flexible training provision
- good workplace assessment
- good progression

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of progress reviews and individual learning plans

Business management

Grade 3

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- good responsiveness to local employer needs

Weaknesses

- insufficiently clear learning process

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PAIGNTON SEC INFO TECH TRAINING CENTRE:

- the friendly and helpful staff
- 'as long as you have a will to learn, they're always there'
- the individual support
- the help staff provide in finding new jobs
- the evening classes - they make it easier for those in full-time work
- the garden

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PAIGNTON SEC INFO TECH TRAINING CENTRE COULD IMPROVE:

- the refreshment facilities - a drinks machine and healthy food
- the work - it is not challenging enough
- the balance between professional discussion and written work - less written work
- the number of evening classes so that there are more choices
- the amount of resources so that they do not have to rely on internet searches

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 3

Strengths

- good partnership links
- effective staff development leading to external qualifications
- good individual support for learners

Weaknesses

- inadequate management information system
- inadequate management and promotion of equal opportunities
- insufficient formal monitoring of quality improvement

30. PSIT has good partnership links that have enabled it to change the profile of its provision. This is particularly demonstrated through the recent subcontracting arrangements with three organisations for local LSC and ESF co-financed projects. The subcontracted arrangements are negotiated individually with each partner and are not yet fully established, but feedback about PSIT's contribution to the projects to date is very positive. PSIT communicates effectively with the contractors, and they all express confidence in working co-operatively with PSIT. Two of the organisations have transferred the subcontracts to PSIT from another provider. The contract holders experienced delays in recruitment, and some of the contracts will expire in December 2005. These contract holders acknowledge that PSIT is working to unrealistic deadlines and have negotiated that PSIT will be funded for learners who achieve their NVQ beyond the expiry date of the contract. PSIT is also actively involved in the local provider network. The principal has long-standing links with the local learning partnership and has recently been appointed chair. PSIT has good working relationships with Jobcentre Plus and the Connexions service.

31. PSIT has a strong commitment to staff gaining further qualifications so that they can extend their work roles and responsibilities. An annual staff appraisal process is used to identify individual staff development needs and link them to organisational priorities. Many staff are new and relatively inexperienced, and they value the opportunity to gain external qualifications. Current staff development priorities include NVQs at level 3 and above, recognised teaching and literacy and numeracy support qualifications, assessor and internal verifier awards, and health and safety qualifications. Many staff are working towards more than one qualification. PSIT's commitment to staff development was recognised as a strength at the previous inspection. In contrast to this commitment to external qualifications, PSIT does not have a coherent internal staff development programme, in particular in relation to equal opportunities. Staff share good practice informally and support each other in acquiring the skills required to fulfil their responsibilities.

32. PSIT has satisfactory resources. The accommodation is adequate, and the equipment and facilities available to the learners are of an appropriate standard. There are 17 members of staff, three of whom are employed part time. PSIT uses appropriate mechanisms to advertise for and recruit staff. All current staff were learners at PSIT at some point before they were recruited. This ensures a familiarity with the organisation and the

way it operates and eases the induction of new staff. However, the range of relevant experience that staff bring with them is limited, especially with regard to their experience of training. New staff are supported appropriately during their three-month probationary period. For the first two weeks, new staff shadow experienced staff and in the following two weeks they are shadowed and mentored. Observations of training or assessment are carried out during the probationary period and staff are supported in improving their practice.

33. PSIT provides appropriate support to learners with additional support needs in literacy and numeracy. Although there is no written strategy for literacy and numeracy support, PSIT carries out satisfactory initial assessment of its own learners and provides appropriate support for learners with identified needs. Two staff are currently working towards qualifications at level 3 in communication and numeracy support.

34. PSIT places a strong emphasis on health and safety. The vice principal holds responsibility for health and safety throughout the organisation. Staff training in health and safety is well established, health and safety are carefully monitored in the workplace, and learners' understanding of health and safety issues, which is good, is thoroughly monitored during progress reviews.

35. Internal communications and the leadership and management of the provision are satisfactory. PSIT generally operates through informal mechanisms. Most staff are based in the same office at the Paignton centre. Three are based in Newton Abbot, but attend the centre in Paignton regularly. Staff work well together and are highly committed to the organisation. There are few written protocols and procedures, and those that exist are not regularly updated. Although this was identified as a weakness in the self-assessment report, PSIT has not taken effective action to remedy it. Changes to procedures are communicated through e-mail. Managers assume that staff can keep up to date with changes through this mechanism, and do not issue updated paperwork or monitor whether procedures are being consistently implemented by all staff. In addition to informal communication, PSIT holds monthly staff, management and NVQ meetings. Additional staff meetings can be held on Fridays, when staff are scheduled to work on the premises. Minutes of meetings are brief and do not include action points with timescales for completion. The management and NVQ meetings are new, and to date there is only one set of minutes available.

36. Management information is inadequate and does not effectively aid decision-making. A number of spreadsheets are used to gather information about different programmes. These are maintained by different members of staff and include different information fields. An in-house database that was introduced to monitor the progress of Jobcentre Plus participants is now being developed to provide appropriate information about all learners. However, it is not yet an effective management tool. Managers do not receive regular reports or trend and intake analyses on retention, progress and achievement rates to provide an overview of the provision or to help them make management decisions. Assessors used a database to record individual learners' progress. Information from the database is used at monthly meetings between the principal and individual assessors. However, the data does not provide an overview of learners' progress by intake. PSIT's managers are increasingly aware of the need to monitor learners' progress more effectively, and to plan and manage individual learners' progress towards timely completion of their qualification aims.

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade 4**

37. Learners receive good individual support from PSIT. They are all visited regularly by their assessors and the visits are often planned to fit in with the learners' work schedules and evening shifts. Learners find the staff very approachable and know that they can contact them outside business hours and at weekends. PSIT has made adjustments to some of its training rooms to improve access for learners with restricted mobility. Swivel chairs have been replaced in the ICT training room by static chairs to offer better stability. PSIT tailors support to meet learners' specific needs. For example, one long-term unemployed learner has been successfully helped to find a job despite barriers to employment. An assessor has supported an employed adult learner with a learning disability, in a discreet and confidential manner, ensuring that they achieve their qualifications without having to disclose their disability to colleagues or employers. Learners value the support they receive from their assessors in understanding the specific standards and requirements for their NVQ. On one occasion, PSIT supported a group of learners by rewriting a set of standards in more familiar language to help the learners understand the unit requirements. PSIT celebrates learners' success with award ceremonies to which employers, colleagues and tutors are invited. Learners appreciate this recognition of their achievements.

38. PSIT's training centres in Paignton and Newton Abbot are accessible to learners with restricted mobility. In Paignton, all the accommodation used by learners is on the ground floor. Access to the first floor is limited, but arrangements can be made to ensure that the ground floor accommodation is used if the need arises.

39. Learners develop a satisfactory understanding of their rights during their programme, predominantly through the NVQ rather than as additional information provided by PSIT. There is limited coverage of equality of opportunity at induction, and progress reviews do not ensure that learners have a good understanding of equal opportunities. Although learners are asked if they are being bullied at work or have any problems, these issues are not fully explored during reviews.

40. PSIT does not have a formal strategy for the management and promotion of equality of opportunity. Insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity was identified as a weakness at the previous inspection, and PSIT has not taken comprehensive and systematic action to deal with it. Although equality and diversity impact measures have been agreed with the local LSC, PSIT has not developed an action plan to implement these measures. The measures focus on three groups of under-represented learners, men, learners with disabilities and learners from a wider geographical area. No specific actions have been taken to target these groups of learners, apart from opening the centre in Newton Abbot to make provision more accessible to learners from a wider geographical area. Some staff do not fully understand the measures and are unaware of their objectives in extending equality of opportunity.

41. As identified in the previous inspection report, marketing materials do not promote equality of opportunity in recruitment. They are not phrased in user-friendly language that would attract members of under-represented groups or learners with additional learning needs. The materials are dull and contain large amounts of written text in a small font. The learner handbook also fails to use the kind of language that might attract learners' interest. It does not include enough information about equal opportunities issues. It contains no policies or procedures for equality of opportunity, for example in relation to harassment

and bullying. The same handbook is produced for learners and employers, leading to confusion about who specific pieces of information are aimed at.

42. PSIT has an equal opportunities policy which includes legal information on disabilities and is displayed at the provider's sites. However, the policy has not been updated since 2002, and the information is out of date and fails to reflect the most recent changes in law. PSIT does not have an adequate complaints policy. The existing document does not break down the process of making a complaint or the procedures involved in following it up. There is insufficient staff development on equality of opportunity issues. Staff receive some initial training on equality of opportunity as part of their induction, and some staff cover equality of opportunity in external training, for example as part of teaching qualifications. However, PSIT does not have a staff development plan to ensure that staff fully understand equality of opportunity. There are no regular briefing sessions to keep staff up to date with the latest developments in equality of opportunity. There is no formalised process of sharing or extending good practice.

43. PSIT does not have effective management tools to monitor equal opportunities. It collects data on learners' gender, ethnicity and disability but does not analyse this to identify trends or plan actions. PSIT holds regular team meetings but equal opportunities is not a routine agenda item. Over the past six months, equality of opportunity was included in three meetings and only one meaningful action point was recorded. Although there is an initial check on whether employers have an appropriate equal opportunities policy, there are no formal arrangements to monitor the implementation of that policy.

Quality improvement

Contributory grade 3

44. PSIT has a satisfactory internal verification system. The previous inspection found that internal verification processes were not routinely complied with, but this has improved significantly. There are regular scheduled internal verification sessions and PSIT has recently made some improvements to the timescales of the first internal verification of portfolios. These changes help new staff to gain confidence and skills in assessment practice. A member of staff has responsibility for maintaining and monitoring the internal verification database. Internal verification schedules are communicated to staff, and the database enables outstanding verification targets to be identified and staff notified. Internal verifiers provide appropriate feedback to assessors. Standardisation meetings take place three times a year and have a fixed agenda to ensure compliance with standards. Some examples of good practice have been shared with the team at these meetings. Although the minutes of standardisation meetings contain action points, their implementation is not formally monitored. Questionnaires are used to gather learners' feedback on the assessment practices, but the results are not formally analysed and there is no identification of trends or issues to be followed up. PSIT holds regular internal verification training workshops with new and existing staff. These focus on the correct completion of basic paperwork, portfolio layout, and the different types of evidence learners could gather for their NVQ portfolios. The sessions are believed to be beneficial to the assessors, although they are not formally evaluated.

45. Quality improvement actions have led to improvements in the provision, particularly on apprenticeship programmes. These actions include the introduction of online testing, the programme of taught sessions to cover the requirements of the technical certificate, and a stronger focus for internal verification processes. These improvements have been accompanied by an increase in achievement rates.

46. At the previous inspection, quality assurance was unsatisfactory. The key weakness was that quality assurance arrangements were incomplete. In response to this weakness, PSIT has introduced a comprehensive quality assurance system. The system is held on a database which is broken down into key quality control categories. All staff are involved in implementing the system as they each have responsibility for maintaining monthly records for a particular aspect of quality assurance. Although the database is comprehensive, it is not yet used to full effect as the entries are not always relevant and focused. The use of the system is monitored to ensure that staff make regular entries in their section of the database. The principal has overall responsibility for the implementation of the process, and regularly reviews progress. Recorded entries can be viewed for each month, but this does not easily give a full overview of the progress being made.

47. Since the previous inspection, managers have introduced a system of regular observations of assessment and training. The system is effective. All staff are observed at least twice a year and new staff are observed more frequently. Useful feedback is given to assessors and trainers to improve their practice.

48. PSIT has a written quality improvement policy which is brief and non-specific. The document does not include a detailed breakdown of key quality points and how they will be dealt with. There is no clear differentiation between quality assurance and quality improvement within the policy.

49. There is insufficient formal monitoring of quality improvements. PSIT's quality improvement plan is inadequate. It consists of a series of broad statements without precise detail or clarification of how PSIT intends to improve the quality of the provision. It does not set formal targets, timescales, milestones or responsibilities. PSIT has several management plans, most of which do not contain specific and measurable objectives. The monitoring of the plans is informal and fails to identify progress being made on specific objectives or evaluate their outcomes. PSIT gathers feedback from learners, employers and staff, but it is not clear how these feedback systems should be used. For example, staff and learners complete the same exit questionnaire. It has been designed to gather information on the quality of the learning experience and has little relevance to staff who leave PSIT. The feedback gained from questionnaires is not analysed effectively, and is seldom built into improvement plans.

50. Staff participate in the self-assessment process and have a good understanding of the purpose of self-assessment. Feedback from employers is collected through the use of questionnaires. However, some criticisms received from employers have not been incorporated into the self-assessment report. The self-assessment report does not offer a critical view of the provider's strengths and weaknesses. It identifies some aspects of standard practice as strengths and fails to identify many of the weaknesses identified by the inspection team.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Business administration and law

Grade 2

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Administration		2
Apprenticeships for young people	55	2
Other government-funded provision	9	None
NVQ training for young people	1	None
Business management		3
Other government-funded provision	116	3

51. The administration provision focuses mainly on work-based learning for young people. It is well established and has operated for a number of years. There are 32 apprentices, 23 advanced apprentices and one learner taking an NVQ at level 4. Seven learners are on a pre-apprenticeship programme, and two are taking administration NVQs in the workplace, one on a co-financed project run by PSIT and one on a co-financed project where PSIT is the subcontractor. Learners can begin their training at any time of the year. About half are recruited through referrals from Connexions and the rest by personal recommendation or direct contact by employers. All work-based learners have an interview and an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills to determine the level of programme that is appropriate for them. All work-based learners have an induction either in their workplace or at one of PSIT's training centres. Training for the NVQ and additional qualifications is extensive and learners can choose which training sessions they attend. PSIT offers an additional 10-week day-release course of training for the technical certificate at the Newton Abbot centre. Key skills training is given individually either in the workplace or at one of the two training centres. Staff visit learners in their workplace every month to assess them, and every nine weeks to review their progress.

52. The provision of business management NVQs has expanded significantly in recent months. There are 116 learners on management NVQs, 106 of whom are on provision subcontracted to PSIT. In total, there are 46 learners taking management NVQs at level 3, 53 at level 4 and 17 at level 5. The arrangements for the NVQ provision differ according to the contract. PSIT staff visit learners in their workplace to assess them at least every three to four weeks.

Administration

Grade 2

Strengths

- good retention rates
- flexible training provision
- good workplace assessment
- good progression

Weaknesses

- ineffective use of progress reviews and individual learning plans

Achievement and standards

53. Retention rates for apprentices are high. Between 2001-02 and 2003-04, 34 out of 36 advanced apprentices and 61 out of 66 apprentices have been retained for the planned duration of their programme. Achievement rates are satisfactory, but apprentices do not all complete their programme within the intended timescale. In 2003-04, only 7 per cent of advanced apprentices and 22 per cent of apprentices achieved their frameworks within the expected time. PSIT continues to support learners after the agreed end date of their programmes. Of the 2003-04 intake, 29 per cent of advanced apprentices and 59 per cent of apprentices have achieved full frameworks to date. A third of the work-based learners recruited in this period are still in learning.

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

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	0		11		14		14	100	8	100	0		0		0	
Retained*	0		7		14		14	100	6	75	0		0		0	
Successfully completed	0		0		4		3	21	1	12	0		0		0	
Still in learning	0		8		5		10	71	0	0	0		0		0	

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

LSC funded work-based learning																
Apprenticeships	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	8		16		27		13	100	26	100	0		0		0	
Retained*	0		8		24		13	100	24	92	0		0		0	
Successfully completed	0		1		16		9	69	21	81	0		0		0	
Still in learning	8		13		9		2	15	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

54. There is good, flexible training provision. PSIT runs workshops at both of its sites on four-and-a-half days a week. Learners can take part in these workshops at the time and place that is most convenient to them. In addition, off-the-job training covering all aspects of the technical certificate is offered on one day a week at the Newton Abbott site on a rolling 10-week programme. For learners who are unable to attend the daytime courses, PSIT offers evening sessions at the Paignton and Newton Abbott sites. These sessions are well attended and used for individual tuition and coaching on any aspect of the programme. Apprentices also have the opportunity to attend any of the short courses that PSIT offers, including computerised accounting and text and word processing. This flexible

provision has increased learners' opportunities to achieve additional qualifications and is often used to fill employment skills gaps. There is excellent take-up of these courses by apprentices. Key skills are taught to individual learners either in their workplace or in workshops, according to their needs. Employers offer additional training in the workplace in the form of in-house courses and on-the-job training.

55. Assessment practice is good. Assessors visit the workplace regularly and have a good rapport with learners. All appropriate assessment methods are used in order to meet the needs of the individual learner and the requirements of the qualification. For example, assessors use more observation and professional discussion for learners working in a second language. In the best sessions, questions are used skilfully to encourage learners to think for themselves. Learners can arrange assessments at any time by bringing work in to any of the workshops or asking assessors to make additional visits to the workplace. Learners are given clear written feedback on what they have achieved, and a detailed action plan to maintain their progress. Assessors have a good practical approach to observation and liaise with learners' supervisors to improve assessment opportunities.

56. Progression is good. All learners have the opportunity to progress through the various levels of business administration or to alternative courses, for example in accounting or law. One learner has progressed from New Deal to an apprenticeship, and another has progressed from an entry to employment programme, through a work placement found for her by PSIT, to full-time employment and an apprenticeship. Employers recognise that learners are acquiring valuable personal and vocational skills, and promote them to job roles requiring increased skills and responsibilities.

57. Initial assessment is satisfactory. All learners have an interview and an initial assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The results are communicated to learners and are used to choose the best programme and to determine whether any additional support is needed. Provision for literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. Two assessors are working towards professional qualifications in literacy and numeracy support and two others support learners in the workplace. Learners can access this support either intensively, to meet a particular need, or over a longer term. For example, one learner was visited twice weekly in the workplace for a month to give him the support he needed to successfully complete the application of number tests. Fourteen learners are currently receiving additional support for key skills.

58. Resources are satisfactory. PSIT's two training sites have a range of suitable accommodation, modern computing equipment and industry standard software. Training materials are well produced and reflect current industrial practice. Staff are suitably qualified and attend relevant courses.

59. The use of progress reviews and individual learning plans is ineffective. Individual learning plans are not fully completed nor are they kept up to date with changes of programme. There is no record of when learners achieve elements of the programme, and it is not always clear whether they have been credited with any prior achievement against the key skills requirements. Staff visit the workplace every nine weeks to carry out progress reviews. The records of progress are too vague to be used in learners' action plans. The targets set are not specific or time-constrained and they are often carried over from one review to the next. No target dates are set for completion and many learners make slow progress.

Leadership and management

60. The management of the administration programme is satisfactory. There is a small cohesive course team which meets daily on an informal basis and whose primary focus is the learner. Formal monthly staff meetings are supplemented by additional meetings about internal verification. Staff development is linked to appraisal and all assessors and trainers are required to keep a continuous professional development file showing courses attended and their relevance to the training process. Internal verification is satisfactory. Records of learners' progress are completed by assessors on an in-house database, but the database does not generate automatic reports for the assessors. Individual learners' progress is discussed at monthly meetings between each assessor and the principal. Learners have a basic knowledge of equality and diversity and are confident when discussing their rights, but they have little awareness of the wider implications of equal opportunities issues. All staff contribute to the self-assessment process, but the report is insufficiently self-critical and fails to recognise many of the strengths and weakness identified by inspectors.

Business management

Grade 3

Strengths

- good development of learners' confidence and skills
- good responsiveness to local employer needs

Weaknesses

- insufficiently clear learning process

Achievement and standards

61. Some learners have not been in formal education or training since leaving school, but they develop confidence and skills while working towards their management NVQs. Learners generally feel that working towards the NVQ has enabled them to recognise their own contribution in the workplace. Some now have the confidence to explore new ways of working. For example, several learners have improved their staff training practice.

62. The expansion of management provision is recent and is a response to new subcontracting arrangements between PSIT and organisations funded for specific projects. Many of the management learners have been on programme for less than six months and there is insufficient data to make judgements on retention and achievement rates.

The quality of provision

63. PSIT works well with external partners to provide programmes that respond to employers' needs. The co-financed provision is aimed at developing the management skills required by businesses and employees in the southwest of England. Management learners are employed mainly in hospitality, leisure and tourism, and health and care. Employers are using the NVQ programme as part of a structured staff development strategy. Some employers have already identified the benefit it has brought to their industry. Many learners are positive about being part of an organisation that offers them a management qualification. They comment that they now look for ways in which to improve their own performance and that of their team. In one organisation, a management learner who is competing for a regional tourism award is using the activity as evidence for his NVQ.

64. Assessment practice is generally satisfactory. Assessors ensure that the learners understand the requirements of the NVQ. They use their knowledge to support and advise learners on how best to present their evidence. Some assessors are experienced and are familiar with the requirements of management NVQs, but others are relatively inexperienced and are less able to provide appropriate guidance. Assessors' visits are arranged flexibly to suit employers and learners. In general, assessors visit learners in the workplace every three or four weeks to carry out assessments and offer support. More frequent visits are made when they are judged to be necessary. For example, every week, one assessor visits learners who lack confidence or portfolio-building skills, to ensure that they are making appropriate progress.

65. Resources are satisfactory. Assessors' caseloads do not exceed 50 learners, ensuring that they have sufficient time to meet learners' needs for assessment and support with their programme. PSIT does not provide training materials for the learners, but in some of the co-financed provision, appropriate materials are provided by another organisation.

66. The learners on subcontracted provision have not been recruited by PSIT, and PSIT is not responsible for carrying out progress reviews on some of these programmes. Some learners on subcontracted provision need literacy and numeracy support but the contracts do not make it clear who is responsible for providing it. However, the assessors select appropriate assessment methods to enable learners with literacy or numeracy needs to fulfil the requirements of the NVQ. Some learners have been recruited by other organisations onto an inappropriate level of the NVQ, or have an inappropriate qualification aim. Where possible, PSIT has tried to intervene and amend the learners' programmes. One learner transferred from level 3 to level 4 when her job responsibilities were increased.

67. The learning process is not sufficiently clear to learners and there is no strategy to ensure they make appropriate progress. Some learners do not understand how much of their qualification they have completed or how much they have left to do. Many learners, especially in the hospitality industry, make minimal progress over the summer because of the seasonal nature of their work. Although assessors record actions for learners to complete in preparation for their next visit, many learners do not fully understand what progress is expected of them. They are not set clear and specific targets for action. No action is taken if learners do not prepare for prearranged assessment visits. In some cases, learners rely too much on assessors to suggest sources of evidence and prepare them for assessment. Some learners do not prepare as required and do not demonstrate the management skills appropriate to their job role or to the achievement of the NVQ. Some learners are not developing the independent learning skills needed to take responsibility for their own learning. However, others do take responsibility for their own learning, and present evidence for assessment that they have mapped to the performance criteria and knowledge requirements themselves. PSIT has yet to develop and implement a strategy to deal with these issues and ensure that learners make good progress and complete within the expected timeframe.

Leadership and management

68. PSIT has appropriate procedures to monitor the assessment and internal verification of the work of business management learners. It complies with awarding body requirements.

69. PSIT has a strong commitment to the continuing professional development of its staff.

Management programmes are relatively new, and PSIT has identified the staff training required for their effective implementation. A comprehensive staff development programme is tailored to individual needs. The assessors are qualified, although some have little assessment experience. Some assessors hold, or are working towards, internal verifier qualifications. However, some assessors have no management experience and none has a management NVQ, although some are working towards one. Some staff are insufficiently experienced and qualified to be fully effective in their role.

70. The self-assessment report does not fully include the management programmes as they are relatively new.

71. Learners show a good understanding about their right to request another assessor, and they know whom to contact at PSIT if they have a complaint. Most learners do not have a good understanding of equality of opportunity. They cannot explain what it means either as it applies to their own workplace or in relation to their role as a learner with PSIT.

