INSPECTION REPORT

Protocol Consultancy Services

09 November 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
• **learndirect** provision
• Adult and Community Learning
• training funded by Jobcentre Plus
• education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
• 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*

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Protocol Consultancy Services

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Protocol Consultancy Services (Protocol) is part of Transworld Publications Services Limited. It operates from a central Birmingham premises. The company was established in 1993 primarily to offer training and consultancy service for the travel industry. It now offers work-based learning in travel and customer services, business administration, management and contact centre operations. In addition to work-based learning, the company carries out a small amount of private consultancy within the travel and hospitality industry. Approximately 75 per cent of Protocol's total business is publicly funded.

2. Most learners are following apprenticeship programmes in travel or customer services. They are recruited across a wide geographical area that includes Tamworth, Birmingham, Coventry, Studley and Stratford. Learners are mainly employed in retailing, business or contact centre travel companies. There are currently 24 advanced apprentices and 38 apprentices. In addition, one learner is working towards a national vocational qualification (NVQ). Protocol contracts with Birmingham and Solihull, Black Country, and Coventry and Warwickshire Learning and Skills Councils (LSC).

3. Protocol is privately owned and operated by the managing director, who is assisted by a director. The company employs a full-time training adviser and two administrators. Two part-time staff are mainly responsible for carrying out assessment and internal verification. A part-time staff member is responsible for the company's accounts. The company also employs a range of consultants on a temporary basis.

OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS
Grade 1

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is outstanding.** Protocol's leadership and management are outstanding, as are its arrangements for quality improvement. Equality of opportunity is good. Training within leisure, travel and tourism, and business administration and law is outstanding.

5. **The inspection team had a high degree of confidence in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** Protocol's self-assessment process is well established and inclusive. All staff are given good opportunities to be involved in the process. The company systematically gathers a wide range of feedback from relevant stakeholders. It evaluates and uses this information effectively to influence the content of the final report. Protocol makes good use of data to contribute to the overall evaluation of the quality of the provision. The most recent report was self-critical and focused on issues that affected the learners' experience. It was comprehensive and accurately identified the strengths that the inspectors found. Weaknesses stated in the report were either resolved by the time of the inspection or judged as not having a significant effect on all of the learners. All except one grade awarded at inspection were the same as the self-assessment grades. In the case of the customer service programme, inspectors awarded a higher grade than that found in the self-assessment report. The self-assessment development plan includes appropriate measures to build on identified strengths and overcome weaknesses. The self-assessment

process is integrated effectively with other quality assurance processes that deliver improvement.

6. **The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to maintain the high quality of provision.**   Following the previous inspection in 2003, Protocol has implemented a number of changes to help drive improvement. At the previous inspection, all areas of learning were graded as good. All elements of leadership and management were graded as good except equality of opportunity, which was graded satisfactory. Protocol has continued to improve, with success rates showing a consistently improving trend. The thorough self-assessment, and drive for improvement through the use of the development plan contributes effectively to the company's capacity to make further improvements.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR PROTOCOL CONSULTANCY SERVICES:

- maintain the high framework success rates
- further develop the effective collection and use of data
- ensure the opportunities for staff to access development are sustained
- continue the drive to implement enhanced quality improvement arrangements

GRADES

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

Grades awarded at inspection

Leadership and management	1
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	2
Quality improvement	1

Leisure, travel and tourism		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Travel and tourism		*1*
Apprenticeships for young people	17	1

Business administration and law		1
Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Customer service		*1*
Apprenticeships for young people	25	1

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The two areas of learning offered by the provider were inspected. They were leisure,

travel and tourism, and business administration and law. Due to the small number of learners, the provision in business administration, management, team leading and contact centre operations were not included in the inspection. The inspection was carried out during one visit of three days.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	9
Number of learners interviewed	21
Number of staff interviewed	13
Number of employers interviewed	8
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	5
Number of visits	1

Leadership and management

Strengths

- good strategic and operational planning
- good staff development
- particularly effective use of data to monitor learners' progress
- good analysis and use of equal opportunities data
- well-implemented learner-centred quality improvement arrangements

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

Leisure, travel and tourism

Travel and tourism

Strengths

- excellent framework success rates
- good skills development
- highly effective off-the-job learning
- good assessment and internal verification practice
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

Business administration and law

Customer service

Strengths

- excellent framework success rates
- very good development of skills and knowledge
- particularly good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- particularly effective assessment and verification practice
- very good use of workplace mentors to support learners

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT PROTOCOL CONSULTANCY SERVICES:

- 'I've gained loads of confidence'
- 'The training is fun'
- 'I really feel I've learned a lot'
- 'Friendly and accessible staff, can contact them anytime'
- 'I now feel able to deal with customer problems'
- 'I enjoy the training days, they are interesting'
- 'I asked for extra support and my tutor gave me lots'
- 'My assessor always makes the time for me'

WHAT LEARNERS THINK PROTOCOL CONSULTANCY SERVICES COULD IMPROVE:

- 'The wording in some of the materials we use to make it clearer'

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT   Grade 1

Strengths

- good strategic and operational planning
- good staff development
- particularly effective use of data to monitor learners' progress
- good analysis and use of equal opportunities data
- well-implemented learner-centred quality improvement arrangements

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

8. Protocol has good strategic and operational planning. A combined business and strategic plan sets out a clear vision for the company in terms of high-quality, and improving training. Good links are made with other plans, such as those for marketing and self-assessment. Twelve key targets for organisational performance within the plan support local and national priorities. The targets reflect Protocol's stated aims and objectives in meeting the needs of the learners. Areas are clearly identified where Protocol needs to build additional future capacity. Senior managers supervise the planning process effectively. Frequent meetings are held to assess and evaluate the progress in completing the business and strategic plan. The planning process is well established and communicated effectively to all staff. The company uses an annual workshop to allow staff to contribute to the formulation and content of the plan. Staff are able to make contributions that directly influence the plan's final content and they are clear how their roles and responsibilities contribute to its achievement. The company sets and monitors appropriately challenging targets. Job descriptions are detailed and updated regularly. Operational planning and management of training is good. There is effective review of all aspects of the planned training. Co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training is good. There is effective consultation within Protocol on proposed plans to develop training delivery. Since the previous inspection, strategies to improve learners' achievement and rectify identified weaknesses have been successful.

9. Protocol provides good staff development. This strength was identified in its most recent self-assessment report. The company encourages all of its staff to develop their professional and vocational skills. A detailed staff development plan includes all the identified training and development needs of staff. The company evaluates all training and produces an annual summary report that helps develop future actions. Staff attend a wide range of internal and external courses. Protocol provides staff with financial support for internally and externally delivered training courses that develop them personally and professionally. Staff can also apply for additional training at any time of the year. A strong emphasis is placed on training that has an effect on learners. For example, Protocol identified a need to improve teaching staff's familiarity with aspects of the learners' programme. In response, staff have carried out significant training activity to ensure that they have recently successfully completed training for one or more aspects of the learners'

apprenticeship framework. All staff receive an appropriate annual appraisal and a review after six months. Progress in achieving previous targets set at appraisal are assessed before new targets for the future are considered. All employees are able to grade themselves on aspects of their work, such as their use of interpersonal and time-management skills. This grading is compared with the employers' grading and contributes to an action-planning process for development. Agreed targets are relevant to the learners' experience. They also include wider role responsibilities related to administrative duties and the environmental recycling of office consumables. The company has achieved a national award made to organisations investing in the development of their staff.

10. Protocol has a satisfactory management information system that it uses to produce a good range of reports for use by all staff. The company uses data particularly effectively to monitor learners' progress and highlight areas for action. Protocol identifies which aspect of a learners' programme they are due to achieve each month. All learners' progress is reviewed each month. Meetings between directors and assessors are effective in identifying learners' progress against agreed targets. Protocol makes good use of a colour-code system to indicate where learners' achievement is a cause for concern. The use of agreed targets and priorities between assessors and directors are very effective in enabling learners to progress quickly to achievement. Workplace mentors are well informed of the outcomes of this process and the part they can play in helping the learners achieve. The company monitors staff workloads effectively and uses data effectively to monitor and review overall company and individual employee performance.

11. Protocol has a satisfactory structure and system to support the development needs of learners in language, literacy and numeracy. All new learners are initially assessed using a nationally recognised test. Where learners' needs are identified, support is arranged in-house using appropriately experienced staff. Links with external agencies to provide specialist support, for example in dyslexia are effective. During the inspection, no learners were receiving support. The company has effective arrangements to provide all learners with independent information and advice on the options available to them before, during and when leaving their programme. It guides learners effectively to relevant external agencies such as Connexions when it identifies that they require detailed help and guidance. The company manages its resources effectively.

Equality of opportunity   Contributory grade 2

12. The company's analysis and use of equal opportunities data are good. Protocol gathers a good range of data on ethnicity and gender at relevant stages of the learning journey. It uses the data effectively to identify areas for action to promote participation of under-represented groups in training. The company sets targets for participation and uses them well to assess the performance of strategies for improvement. It recognises that the recruitment of men tends to conform to stereotype for the sectors and has carried out appropriate action to encourage more under-represented groups to apply for training. For example, it has targeted all-male schools with activities to increase pupils' understanding of the training opportunities that are available. Protocol works with a range of external agencies to raise potential learners' awareness of the available training and careers. Current recruitment for learners from minority ethnic groups is good, particularly in customer service. The company deals with learners' individual barriers to participation effectively. Learners and staff's working relationships are productive. Staff know learners well and make good provision to accommodate their different needs.

13. Protocol manages equality of opportunity effectively. A director has overall responsibility for equality and diversity issues and has received suitable training activities to develop this role. Protocol's equal opportunities policy makes detailed reference to learners' rights, responsibilities and all current legislation. The company has effective processes to ensure regular updating of policies and procedures. Equal opportunities are well considered in regular documented meetings with Protocol's staff. The company uses an effective review process to ensure that learning and publicity materials are free from bias. Advertising material includes a positive statement about equality. Informative displays in the main training room are used to raise learners' appreciation of equality and diversity issues and promote non-stereotypical views of careers and training.

14. Protocol has an appropriate range of policies and procedures that include bullying, harassment and complaints. It monitors a detailed equal opportunities action plan regularly and uses to guide actions for improvement. The plans targets clearly link to the priorities within the business plan. All learners receive an induction at which equal opportunities is considered adequately. The learners and work-based mentors receive a useful guide to equal opportunities. Protocol uses off-the-job training sessions effectively to promote learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues. There is good use of mentors' training to raise the learners' awareness of how to treat young people in the workplace. All learners receive regular progress reviews. However, they are not always used effectively to reinforce learners' understanding of equality and diversity issues. Protocol recognises this and recently introduced a more systematic process to rectify identified shortcomings. However, it is too early to make a judgement on the effect of this initiative. Learners have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities. They know how the law protects them and have a good understanding of the ways they can raise a complaint. Protocol has not received any complaints through its formal process. However, the company documents any concerns that the learners raise informally and analyses these to help develop future action. The company takes timely and effective remedial action. Learners report that they trust Protocol's staff and are confident that issues raised will be dealt with quickly in a confidential and effective manner. All staff have at least an adequate understanding of equality and diversity issues relevant to their role. Workplace mentors and Protocol's staff have received appropriate and recent training. Protocol's managers respond effectively to the diverse needs of staff and learners.

15. The company's vetting and monitoring of employers' understanding of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Protocol's processes are effective in ensuring that employers understand their legal responsibilities with respect to equality of opportunity. Where relevant, Protocol offers helpful guidance and support to employers who may need to develop relevant guidelines. The training centre and facilities are accessible to learners with restricted mobility. Learners' success is celebrated effectively. Actions to further improve the publicity of learners' success through the use of an enhanced website are well advanced.

Quality improvement   Contributory grade 1

16. Protocol has implemented learner-centred quality improvement arrangements well. It has a clear quality improvement framework that is supported by a quality assurance strategy and comprehensive set of procedures. Quality improvement focuses effectively on improving the learners' experience. The arrangements cover all the key stages of their

training programme. The company documents the processes in detail and relevant staff use them. All staff have a good understanding of the quality assurance arrangements. They fully understand the part they play in their implementation. Protocol monitors a quality improvement plan effectively and uses it to drive forward changes that benefit the learners. The director is responsible for quality assurance within the company and ensures that the quality assurance strategy and procedures are revised regularly. In addition, Protocol has used examples of good practice from other providers, and a national standard for excellence in business, to evaluate and develop their quality assurance arrangements.

17. A director audits the company's quality improvement processes regularly. This includes a review of their effectiveness in supporting quality improvement. The audit checks that procedures are followed and that completed documents are of a satisfactory quality. Staff attend regular quality assurance workshops, at which improvements to the quality arrangements are considered. They are well attended by staff and result in improvements to the procedures and related documents.

18. A programme of staff observations of key stages in the learners' training is carried out every three months. Observations include the learners' recruitment interviews, progress reviews, off-the-job training and support sessions. The company makes detailed records of all observations and provides appropriate feedback and uses it to update personal action plans for improvement. However, in a few cases the written feedback is not fully evaluative. Where unsatisfactory performance is observed, measures for improvement are agreed to improve professional practice. Good practice, including the use of high-quality learning materials is shared appropriately. The company has started to use subject coaching. However, it is too early to make a judgement on its effect.

19. Protocol has a very effective approach to the use of learners' and employers' feedback to support quality improvement. Learners' feedback is obtained at the completion of induction, off-the-job training and on leaving the programme. The company analyses the responses, evaluates them and uses them to improve the learners' experience. For example, as a result of feedback, Protocol made improvements to the contents of the learners' handbook and induction delivery. In addition, it has made good use of suggestions for improvement generated at focus groups that include learners and employers.

20. Assessment practice is good. Internal verification is very effective in raising the quality of the programmes. Its implementation complements other quality assurance arrangements. The company plans and carries out assessment and verification well. Internal verifiers ensure that assessors receive suitably detailed written feedback that supports their professional development. Protocol holds regular standardisation meetings at which it shares good practice. Records of meetings are detailed. The company uses training effectively to support the development of staff in assessment and verification practice. Assessment and internal verification practice meets and often exceeds the standards required of the national awarding bodies.

21. Protocol has carried out a self-assessment process every year since 1998. The most recent report was updated just before the inspection. The company has integrated self-assessment effectively within its quality improvement processes. The associated self-assessment development plan is very well used to monitor progress and identify

priorities for quality improvement. During the self-assessment process, a wide range of data was used to contribute to the overall evaluation of the quality of provision. Staff and other stakeholders were appropriately involved in the process. The company made good use of feedback from learners' and employers' forums to compile the self-assessment report. This feedback was supplemented by views obtained from the annual survey of employers. Workplace mentors who attended workshops were able to contribute views that contributed to the self-assessment process. Staff have a good understanding of the content of the report and the progress in achieving the development plan's targets.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Leisure, travel and tourism   **Grade 1**

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Travel and tourism		*1*
Apprenticeships for young people	17	1

22. There are 17 learners on the travel and tourism services programme. Of these, 16 are apprentices and one is an advanced apprentice. Most of the learners are employed. Typically, they work for travel companies in sales, call-handling or customer service roles. All learners complete an initial assessment, induction and a four-week intensive training period, before entering the workplace. Learners are assessed and receive on-the-job training in the workplace. Off-the-job training is carried out at Protocols' training centre. Each learner has a workplace mentor to support them and help manage their on-the-job training. Protocol's staff visit learners in the workplace to carry out assessment, progress reviews and training.

Travel and tourism

Strengths

- excellent framework success rates
- good skills development
- highly effective off-the-job learning
- good assessment and internal verification practice
- good support for learners

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

23. Learners achieve excellent success rates for apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship frameworks. Advanced apprenticeships' NVQ and framework success rates in 2003-04 and 2004-05 were excellent at 100 per cent. Data for 2005-06 indicates that this trend has been maintained. Timely success rates show an improving trend and are significantly higher than the national averages that are available for 2003-04 and 2004-05. Most learners are apprentices. The NVQ and framework success rates for these learners in 2003-04 and 2004-05 were excellent, and significantly above the national average. The success rates show an improving trend. Unvalidated data for 2005-06 indicates that both NVQ and framework success rates are around 100 per cent. Timely success rates have improved significantly and are well above the national average. For 2005-06, unvalidated LSC data indicates the timely success rate for both the NVQ and framework is 100 per cent.

24. Learners develop good skills. They acquire increased confidence in being able to

take on progressively more complex tasks and additional job responsibilities. They are able to demonstrate good customer service and communication skills. All learners develop very effective skills in applying product knowledge to deal with a wide range of customers, some of whom are angry or confused. The development of other job-specific skills, such as the use of information and communications technology is good. Learners have a good familiarity with the occupational standards and can confidently match workplace evidence against them. They have good opportunities to progress onto different or higher levels of the same programmes. Learners keep a log of their continuous professional development, which they find useful in allowing them to monitor and reflect on their progress.

25. Learners take pride in their portfolios of evidence and ensure that they are well organised and presented. Their portfolios show a good standard of work and evidence of competence. All current learners are making good or excellent progress. Most learners are achieving targets recorded on their action plan by the agreed date, or earlier.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	4	100	42	100	34
		timely	2	50	27	50	22
	2004-05	overall	9	100	47	100	33
		timely	7	100	33	78	25
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	25	83	64	72	44
		timely	12	52	49	48	32
	2004-05	overall	18	94	65	78	52
		timely	11	88	47	61	36

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

26. Protocol's off-the-job training is highly effective. Good-quality initial training allows learners to achieve key skills and technical certificates sometimes before they start in the workplace. Learning sessions are fun and participative. There are good resources for training, including some entertaining games. Lesson plans include clearly identified aims and objectives, and individual coaching is arranged for learners as required. Sessions include good use of questions and answers to check and reinforce the learners' understanding. Learners speak highly of the tutors and receive many opportunities for evaluation of training. Their suggestions are routinely evaluated and acted upon quickly to benefit the learners.

27. Protocol has good assessment and internal verification practices. These include well-organised and thorough assessment. All learners receive clear explanations of assessment decisions and how they can improve their performance. Assessment is learner-led. They have full involvement in the process, which includes cross-referencing to the occupational standards. Evidence is well recorded. The workplace mentor is fully involved in helping learners identify gaps in the necessary evidence to achieve their

programme. They work well together to ensure that targets are completed by or before the agreed date. The on- the-job learning is matched effectively to the requirements of the programme. Interviews to assess learners' prior achievement are thorough and discussions acted upon. Learners' optional units are chosen using findings from vocational initial assessment and the requirements of the job role. Very effective communication ensures that all interested parties contribute to this process. Internal verification exceeds the awarding body's requirements. It is regular, thorough and judgements are sound. There is good use of internal verification to gain quality improvement. Clear standards are laid down in the internal verification procedures and adhered to. Lesson and assessment observations are well planned and implemented. Their outcomes are used effectively for improvement.

28. Learners receive good support. Protocol ensures that no learners are disadvantaged when they encounter personal or learning difficulties. Communication between the assessor and mentor are good. They work together as an effective and co-ordinated team to identify and overcome any barriers to learners' achievement. They provide good help to allow the learners to achieve their action plans and gain new skills. Protocol gives thorough practical help and advice to learners seeking employment or those who wish to carry out wider roles and responsibilities. Learners are highly motivated. The company uses the progress review process to support learners effectively. Protocol uses workshops for mentors and staff to ensure that the learners receive a high level of commitment and guidance. The assessors, workplace mentors and learners have a good working relationship. The support arrangements for learners with literacy, numeracy and language needs are satisfactory. Protocol's staff are able to provide individual support in the workplace or during off-the-job training sessions.

Leadership and management

29. The programme is managed well. Staff are appropriately qualified and occupationally experienced within the industry. There is good participation in a programme of relevant events designed to ensure continuous professional development. Staff appraisal identifies a good range of short- and long-term targets that are clearly linked to benefiting the learners. Protocol's staff have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities and work well together. There is good use of data to develop and plan the programme. Internal communication is good. There are appropriate links with external organisations. Communication between travel companies and Protocol are good. Accommodation used for off-the-job training is comfortable and well maintained. Learning resources are good. Learners have good access to computers and the internet. They are able to use attractively presented workbooks for guided and independent study.

30. Learners have a good or better understanding of equality of opportunity and diversity. They are protected appropriately during their training. Learners know what to do if they wish to raise an issue of concern while training at Protocol's training centre or at work. All learners are confident that their views are respected. Action to resolve issues raised by learners has been effective. The industry has seen many recent changes that have affected employment opportunities. Protocol has worked hard to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged. The support given to learners who experience personal or learning barriers to success is good.

31. The self-assessment process is well established. Staff contribute very effectively to identify strengths and weaknesses included in the report. Employers were fully involved in

giving feedback that contributed to the self-assessment process. The associated self-assessment report was detailed and identified most of the strengths found during inspection. The self-assessment development plan has been used effectively to introduce improvements. Quality assurance and internal audit arrangements are good.

Business administration and law   Grade 1

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Customer service		*1*
Apprenticeships for young people	25	1

32. There are 25 learners on customer service programmes. Eighteen of these are advanced apprentices and seven are apprentices. All learners are recruited through their employers and work in national travel organisations. Learners have an initial assessment and individual induction at the start of their programme. Most training takes place in the workplace. In addition, learners attend off-the-job training each month at Protocol's training centre. At these sessions they receive training for technical certificates, key skills and the knowledge aspects of their programme. Staff visit learners at work to carry out action-planning for evidence collection, assessment, progress reviews and individual coaching.

Customer service

Strengths

- excellent framework success rates
- very good development of skills and knowledge
- particularly good co-ordination of on- and off-the-job training
- particularly effective assessment and verification practice
- very good use of workplace mentors to support learners

Weaknesses

- no key weaknesses identified

Achievement and standards

33. Overall success rates for apprenticeship frameworks are excellent. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, apprenticeship framework and NVQ success rates were consistently high and improving. Rates were well above national average. In 2004-05, all learners achieved their framework. Unvalidated LSC data for 2005-06 indicates the high success rates and improved trend has been maintained. In 2003-04 and 2004-05, advanced apprenticeship framework success rates were well above the national average. There is an improving trend in overall and timely success rates during this time. However, the number of learners in 2004-05 was small. Unvalidated LSC data for 2005-06 indicates that the framework success rate has declined. However, all learners leaving their programme have done so for valid personal and professional reasons. Protocol has effectively supported all learners during this time of transition. For each of the years 2003-05, the NVQ success rate has been excellent at 100 per cent. Timely success rates show an improving trend and are consistently well above national averages.

34. The learners' portfolios of evidence are of a high standard. They develop effective personal responsibility and great pride in completing and presenting them for assessment.

Most learners pass their key skills and technical certificates at the first sitting.

35. All learners develop very good skills and knowledge. Workplaces are of a very good standard. They offer learners a supportive environment for personal development and a very good range of relevant assessment opportunities. This helps the learners to progress quickly. Learners are often part of a workplace team. They receive challenging and demanding roles and responsibilities that promote their confidence and develop their personal and occupational skills. Learners are able to use the good support and learning opportunities to improve their customer service and job-specific relevant knowledge effectively. They quickly develop confidence in dealing with a range of customer needs, both face to face and while using the telephone. Learners are able to handle a wide range of work-related situations with success and sensitivity.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	18	100	41	89	23
		timely	5	39	27	28	14
	2004-05	overall	2	100	40	100	25
		timely	2	100	30	100	18
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	28	96	46	82	32
		timely	11	54	24	39	16
	2004-05	overall	7	100	54	100	41
		timely	4	100	36	57	27

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: www.lsc.gov.uk).

The quality of provision

36. Protocol co-ordinates on- and off-the-job training particularly well. Off-the-job training is planned thoroughly in advance to incorporate the requirements of the NVQ, key skills and technical certificates for both frameworks. If a learner cannot attend the off-the-job training, they receive individual learning packs and individual coaching in the workplace from a Protocol tutor. Schemes of work are updated annually as a result of formal evaluations and changes to qualifications. The standard of off-the-job training is good. There is very good use of workplace mentors to support learners' qualifications. Protocol's staff and workplace mentors liaise very effectively to plan suitable learning and assessment opportunities that complement on- and off-the-job training. Employers' in-house training programmes are well cross referenced against the requirements of the learners' programme. There is good use of these to maximise learning and assessment opportunities. Learners report that this helps them greatly to identify evidence that they can use to claim competence.

37. Assessment practice is particularly effective. It is planned very well. Assessment is carried out frequently and totally involves the learner at each stage of the process. At inspection, learners reported examples where they had requested and received very timely and relevant assessment to enable them to complete their qualifications more quickly. There is good use of a range of assessment techniques that include assessment

by observation in the workplace. After each observation, the learner receives detailed written and verbal feedback on what they have achieved and how to improve their performance. The assessors and learners jointly use the NVQ standards well to cross-reference evidence. Different methods of assessment are negotiated and planned effectively. Protocol makes good use of accreditation of prior learning evidence to benefit the learners. Learners can access adequate information and advice on future career opportunities. They are provided with and use good opportunities to progress to other or higher qualifications.

38. The company makes very good use of workplace mentors to support the learners. Senior workplace managers and Protocol's staff jointly identify appropriate workplace mentors to support learners. The role of workplace mentor is regarded as a prestigious responsibility. Many mentors have already achieved an apprenticeship framework and are therefore familiar with the qualification requirements. The mentors attend an information workshop and receive useful written guidance. Protocol provides good support in helping mentors to develop their role. Mentors work very effectively with learners to ensure that they keep to their planned targets in their individual learning plan and complete their qualification as soon as possible. The mentors work well with Protocol's staff and are fully involved in the learners' programme. They contribute fully to learners' assessment and progress reviews. Workplace mentors receive feedback from Protocol's staff on the progress the learners are making. They value this information and use it in their monthly individual reviews with learners, when reviewing progress towards programme or work-related targets. Mentors guide learners effectively in the efficient use of time to achieve targets, and contribute to programme development and improvement. They contribute well to feedback processes such as the quality assurance forums, where feedback is sought and later used to improve the learners' programmes.

Leadership and management

39. Programme management is good. A team of three staff are responsible for supporting learners throughout their programme. All are qualified assessors and two are qualified as internal verifiers. Staff are appropriately experienced and vocationally qualified. They receive industry-relevant updating, which is recorded in their personal log. Staff receive good development opportunities and have recently taken their own key skills and technical certificates. Both internal and external communication is good. Protocol sets and monitors demanding targets for all staff. These include assessment, learner achievement, and recruitment and evaluation grades of their training sessions. These are discussed and progress to achievement is evaluated at two-monthly reviews, which form part of the appraisal process. Action plan targets are set that effectively support the attainment of Protocol's business and strategic plan. The company uses data effectively to monitor learners' success and drive forward improvement. The self-assessment report accurately identified the key strengths noted at inspection. Actions to rectify the weakness stated in the report have been effective.

40. Learners are well protected during their training. Arrangements to combat bullying and harassment are effective. Equality of opportunity and diversity are promoted satisfactorily with learners. They are explored and reinforced effectively at induction, progress reviews and learning sessions. Topics are appropriately revisited throughout the learner's time on programme. All learners and mentors receive a useful handbook that includes current and appropriate information on equality and diversity issues. Mentors and staff receive appropriate training, including a reinforcement of the requirement of the

Every Child Matters agenda. Informative displays are exhibited in the off-the-job training room. Arrangements to support learners with identified literacy, numeracy or language needs are satisfactory. Protocol ensures that learners do not experience any disadvantage if they have any learning or personal need that may act as a barrier to achievement. Staff have adequate qualifications to provide the appropriate level of literacy or numeracy training. Adequate referral channels have been established for requests for help from external specialist agencies.

41. Internal verification is particularly good. All aspects of the learners' experience are quality assured thoroughly through the verification processes. Internal verification is well planned and documented. Practices are frequently observed and updated. Plans used to sample documentary evidence in learners' portfolios are detailed. Assessors receive very useful written feedback on practice. Action points to improve assessor judgements and those relating to internal verification are monitored effectively. Internal verification practice can be easily monitored through learners' portfolios. Learners have a satisfactory or better understanding of the internal verification process. They know how to appeal if they disagree with an assessment decision. Standardisation meetings are planned six months in advance across the assessor and verifier team. Outcomes of the meetings are fully recorded. They are very effective in ensuring improvements to assessment and internal verification arrangements. Feedback from external verifiers is acted upon quickly and contributes effectively to improvement. Quality improvement arrangements are good. They clearly focus on improving the learners' experience and success rates.