

Lincoln Academy Ltd t/a ISIS Training

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53035

Name of lead inspector: Gerard McGrath HMI

Last day of inspection: 17 February 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Lincoln Academy Ltd, trading as ISIS Training Ltd (ISIS), a company limited by guarantee, was formed when ownership of the training arm of ISIS Training and Recruitment Ltd was transferred to Lincoln College in September 2008. It is wholly owned by Lincoln College and established as a 'not for taxable profit' company. Governors of Lincoln College are ultimately responsible for the governance of ISIS.
2. ISIS contracts with the Skills Funding Agency to provide apprenticeships and foundation learning and is a partner in a Train to Gain consortium led by Lincoln College. ISIS provides apprenticeships and National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) programmes in information and communication technology (ICT), hospitality, business administration, management and customer service. Government-funded training makes up the majority of the provision.
3. One hundred and thirty nine apprentices and 52 Train to Gain learners are currently working towards business administration, customer services, management and accounting qualifications. Fifty eight learners are on foundation courses. The majority of learning is delivered in the workplace. Foundation learners and those on accountancy courses attend regular training sessions in either the Lincoln or Boston training centres. A small number of learners working towards qualifications in ICT and hospitality were not included in this inspection.
4. A management board, consisting of the college senior management team, the director of employer engagement and the ISIS operations manager, oversees the management of ISIS Training, and meets monthly. Lincoln College manages the company's finances.
5. The county of Lincolnshire is a mainly rural county with a population of approximately 687,000. The majority of people live in the city of Lincoln and the towns of Boston, Gainsborough, Grantham, Sleaford, Spalding and Skegness. At the time of the last census minority ethnic groups accounted for only 1.5% of the Lincolnshire population.
6. No other organisation provides training on behalf of the provider.

Type of provision	Number of learners in 2009/10
Provision for young learners: Foundations for learning and life	60 full-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	100 full-time learners 148 full-time learners

Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 3
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	Grade
Quality of provision	3
Outcomes for learners	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject areas	Grade
Preparation for life and work	3
Business, administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

7. The provider’s overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The proportion of learners who gain their qualifications is around the national average for most training programmes and very high for a few courses. Learners make satisfactory progress, gain confidence and improve their work practices. A high priority is placed on promoting the health and well-being of learners and learners feel safe. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is satisfactory. Tutors and assessors provide satisfactory advice, guidance and support whilst providing individual coaching that helps learners develop their vocational skills and knowledge. The leadership and management of the provision are satisfactory. The discussion and reinforcement of relevant equality and diversity topics with learners are good.
8. Strategies to improve learner outcomes and the quality of provision have had a satisfactory impact. ISIS recognises that the incomplete quality improvement arrangements and the use of management information to plan improvements are areas for improvement. Outcomes for learners have improved since the last

inspection,. The improvement in success rates on many programmes reflect the improvement in national performance. Outcomes across all apprenticeship programmes are around national averages. Learners' completion within their planned duration rates has improved since the last inspection but still varies significantly between programmes.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for accountancy apprentices and advanced management NVQ learners are very high. Progression rates on Entry to Employment (E2E) programmes are good. Success rates for most work-based learning programmes are around national averages.
- The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but in formal accountancy sessions it is particularly good. Assessors provide satisfactory individual coaching to learners in the workplace. Assessors make effective use of a wide range of assessment methods in business administration and accountancy programmes. This includes good use of technology to support assessment such as the online submission of electronic evidence by learners.
- Learning resources are good in training centres. Training accommodation at the provider's centres is of a good standard with the provision of computer access for learners. A very good range of generic and occupationally-specific online resources is provided for learners
- Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well. ISIS staff work closely with employers to ensure that training is matched well to the needs of the workplace. Timing of training and assessment is generally planned to suit the learners' needs. However, the number and range of work placements for foundation learners are limited.
- ISIS has good partnerships with employers. Brokers and assessors have built very positive partnerships with local employers and know them well. Employers are very supportive of learners and are keen for them to succeed. Learners benefit from the good involvement of their managers in learning.
- Communications are very good across the company. Good use is made of the company intranet, email and structured meetings to share information with staff, senior managers and employers across a wide geographical area. ISIS makes good use of learner and employer feedback to make improvements. Managers respond swiftly to requests and suggestions and keep learners well informed about any actions taken.
- The very effective implementation of an e-learning strategy makes effective use of the new teaching resources to support learners. Online assessment portfolios have been established well in a majority of programmes.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Managers and staff place a strong emphasis on the safety and well-being of learners.
- Performance targets for staff are insufficiently specific. Assessors share outcome targets but these emphasise the completion of NVQs and are

insufficiently focused on apprenticeship framework success.

- The analysis of available management information is insufficient. A wide range of data is collected in a number of different systems. However, these are not used sufficiently well to agree appropriate performance targets for improvement strategies.
- Formal quality improvement systems are incomplete. Arrangements do not cover all key aspects of learning. Managers rely on informal monitoring of workplace coaching and agreed grading criteria are not used. Planned quality improvement activities are incomplete.
- Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners have a good understanding of relevant topics. Monitoring of the performance of different groups is good. No significant differences exist in the achievement of learners from minority ethnic backgrounds or of different gender.

What does ISIS need to do to improve further?

- Agree specific and measureable targets for staff performance which include all parts of the apprenticeship frameworks to improve success rates within the planned duration of training.
- Increase the focus on learning and skill development in workplace coaching practice to improve learners' progress and monitoring of achievements.
- Improve teaching and learning through better evaluation of learning and improved lesson planning to meet individual learning needs.
- Increase the analysis and use of available data to identify trends in performance and plan improvements through the use of appropriate performance targets.
- Develop systematic arrangements to measure the quality of teaching and learning including workplace coaching, identify areas for improvement and provide training to bring about better teaching, coaching and learning.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- learning new skills
- the very supportive tutors
- learning advisers who explain topics well
- useful training which helps with career progression
- the good personal support from learning advisers
- the enjoyable learning
- gaining increased confidence and knowledge
- working in groups
- the safe and comfortable learning environments.

What learners would like to see improved:

- nothing reported.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the very clear communications from ISIS
- the good working relationships with brokers and learning advisors
- having more effective employees
- the effective promotion of learning to employees.

What employers would like to see improved:

- nothing reported.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. Outcomes for learners have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. The increase in success rates on many programmes reflects the general increase in national performance. Outcomes across all apprenticeship programmes are around the national averages. Improvements in the proportion of learners who complete within the planned duration of their learning have improved since the last inspection, but still vary significantly between programmes.
10. ISIS has successfully improved several of the weaknesses identified at the last inspection and success rates have continued to improve. The views of staff, learners and employers are used well to make improvements to the provision. The self assessment report satisfactorily identifies many of the strengths of the provision but does not give sufficient attention to the success rates of all programmes.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

11. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for accountancy apprentices and advanced management learners are very high. Programme success rates for business administration advanced apprentices and management apprentices are around the national averages. Success rates on a few programmes are below national averages, including business administration apprentices and customer service advanced apprentices. The proportion of learners who gain their qualifications within the planned duration of their learning varies across programmes, but is satisfactory overall.
12. Learners feel safe in the training centres and are clear about what to do if they identify bullying or harassment. They demonstrate a good understanding of internet safety.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

13. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teaching and learning in formal accountancy sessions is particularly good. Tutors use of a good range of teaching strategies to encourage learners to engage in the session. In a few lessons, tutors pay insufficient attention to meeting individual learning needs. Assessors provide satisfactory individual coaching to learners in the workplace.
14. Assessors make effective use of a wide range of assessment methods in business administration and accountancy programmes. This includes good use of technology to support assessment such as the online submission of electronic video evidence by learners. Electronic portfolios are used well to record and present learners' workplace evidence.

15. Target setting for learning is satisfactory. Assessors set short-term targets, which help the learner to progress to longer-term goals. However, many targets are insufficiently specific to enable the learner to progress more quickly. Targets do not always identify the learning and skills development required.
16. Monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory. Many assessors complete progress reviews in great detail, encouraging learners to reflect on their work practices and helping them to link the skills and knowledge they have developed to the criteria of their qualifications.
17. Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. Where low levels of literacy or numeracy skills of work-based learners are identified additional learning support is provided in the workplace by a dedicated support tutor. Support for the development of foundation learners' literacy and numeracy skills is also satisfactory.
18. Learning resources are good in the training centres. Training accommodation at the provider's centres is of a good standard with computer access for learners. Textbooks are provided for the accountancy learners and there is a very good range of generic and occupationally specific online resources.
19. Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well. ISIS staff work closely with employers to ensure that training is matched well to the needs of the workplace. The timing of training and assessment is generally planned to suit the individual learners' needs.
20. ISIS has good partnerships with employers. Brokers and assessors have built very positive partnerships with local employers and know them well. Employers are very supportive of learners and are keen for them to succeed. Learners benefit from the involvement of their managers in learning.
21. Too few foundation learners benefit from work experience. The number and types of vocational settings which are available to foundation learners for relevant work experience are limited.
22. Support for learners is satisfactory. Most learners receive accurate initial advice and guidance about which learning programme to follow. Learners receive very effective support for personal problems.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

23. Senior managers provide effective leadership and clear direction for the provision. Directors and senior managers have successfully maintained the enthusiasm and loyalty of staff since the change of ownership. The college board of corporation receives reports on performance, and the college finance and audit committees oversee aspects of governance. Significant financial investment has improved the quality of training accommodation and resources

for learning.

24. Communications are very good across the company. Good use is made of the company intranet, email and structured meetings to share information with staff and senior managers across a wide geographical area. Employers speak highly of the frequency and relevance of communication from ISIS.
25. The development and implementation of an e-learning strategy are very effective. ISIS successfully gained funding from external bodies to purchase equipment. Online assessment portfolios have become well-established in a number of programmes. Staff, learners and some employers are trained and supported in using the online system very effectively to collect evidence for qualifications.
26. ISIS makes good use of learner and employer feedback to make improvements. Feedback from learners and employers is collected and analysed regularly and used well to identify trends in the quality of the provision. Managers respond swiftly to requests and suggestions and keep learners informed about any actions taken as a result of the feedback.
27. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Managers and staff place a strong emphasis on the safety and well-being of learners. A clear set of policies and procedures are in place and staff understand their responsibilities well. Any incidents relating to the safety of learners are taken seriously and appropriate actions taken.
28. Performance targets for staff are insufficiently specific. Target setting in business and strategic plans is satisfactory. The focus is strongly on financial performance. Monthly staff and manager case conferences provide a tool for setting specific targets for all programmes. Assessors share outcome targets, but these over-emphasise the completion of NVQs and are insufficiently focused on apprenticeship framework success.
29. The analysis of available management information is insufficient. A wide range of data is collected in a number of different systems. However, these are not used sufficiently well to accurately identify trends in staff performance and agree appropriate performance targets for improvement strategies.
30. Formal quality improvement systems are incomplete. Arrangements do not yet cover all key aspects of learning. Managers rely on informal monitoring of workplace coaching and agreed grading criteria are not used. Planned quality improvement activities are incomplete. Standards of record keeping and assessor practice vary across the provision. Staff are satisfactorily involved in the self- assessment process and make clear contributions to the judgements contained in the report.
31. Promotion of equality and diversity is good. Learners have good understanding of relevant topics. Monitoring of the performance of different groups is good. No significant differences exist in the achievement of learners from minority

ethnic backgrounds or different genders. Variation in success rates by age group and the low representation of apprentices with disabilities have been identified but no improvement targets set.

Subject areas

Foundation learning

Grade 3

Context

32. Fifty-eight learners attend the Foundation Learning programme in the Lincoln or Boston centres. Two learners are completing the E2E programme. Learners take part in planned training, which prepares them for work, further education or training. Programmes include functional skills, employability, personal and social development, work experience and NVQ level 1 qualifications for some learners.

Key findings

- The rates of progression into education, employment and training from the E2E programme have increased and are good. The majority of learners progress to further education. Learners produce satisfactory work which they collect in portfolios. However, these are not sufficiently well organised to help learners understand their progress.
- Learners make satisfactory progress and improve their confidence, self-esteem and employability skills whilst taking part in training sessions. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work and of how to stay healthy. Learners work well together and appreciate the safe and welcoming training environments.
- Learners feel safe in the training centres and are clear about what to do if they identify bullying or harassment and demonstrate a good understanding of internet safety.
- The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the better sessions learners are encouraged to join in debates by introducing relevant discussion topics. They contribute to sessions and communicate their views well. In the less successful lessons, tutors pay insufficient attention to meeting individual learning needs. Learners work on single tasks that neither sufficiently challenge more able learners nor meet the needs of others. Use of the available technology is underdeveloped in some sessions. Tutors rely too much on worksheets and folders do not contain enough examples of the learner's own work. Tutors do not always assess and mark learners' work in a timely manner.
- Initial assessment and induction are satisfactory and used to plan outline individual learning programmes and progression routes. However, there is insufficient evaluation and recording of learning in order to plan future teaching and learning. Learners make slow progress.
- Support for the development of learners' literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory. Staff provide effective individual support to learners in sessions, but do not have appropriate qualifications in teaching or in meeting literacy and numeracy support needs.

- Progress reviews are satisfactory and measure the broad progress and qualification achievements of learners. Learners have a satisfactory understanding and recollection of equality and diversity issues which are effectively reinforced during the reviews. Staff and learners regularly discuss cultural and diversity issues to reinforce their understanding.
- The foundation learning programme provides flexible courses that allow learners to improve skills, gain qualifications and progress to further education, training, apprenticeships or employment. However, the development of schemes of work is insufficient in order to plan the whole curriculum.
- Links with employers are good and employers value the good communication and support from ISIS staff. However, the number and types of vocational settings which are available to learners for relevant work experience is limited.
- Learners receive appropriate and timely information from staff and through close partnership working with Connexions personal advisers guide them to appropriate progression routes. Learners have good opportunities to express their views and the provider responds well to their suggestions. Learners make good use of the suggestion box and the learner forum where they record complaints and offer ideas for improvement.
- The management of the newly-developed foundation learning programme is satisfactory. Communications are good. Regular staff meetings and case conferences focus on learners' progress and staff targets. However, staff performance targets for the achievement of qualifications on the programme are insufficiently specific and measurable. Staff are appropriately involved in the self-assessment and action-planning processes to improve the quality of the provision.

What does ISIS need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning through better evaluation of learning and improved lesson planning to meet individual learning needs.
- Develop schemes of work to support the planning of the curriculum to ensure all teaching and learning targets are identified.
- Increase learners' employability by developing a wider range of work placement opportunities.

Business administration & law

Grade 3

Context

33. There are currently 191 learners working towards qualifications in business administration, customer service, accountancy, management and team leading. One hundred and thirty nine are apprentices of whom 66 are following advanced apprentice programmes. There are 52 learners working towards NVQs on Train to Gain programmes.

Key findings

- Overall success rates improved in 2009/10 and are satisfactory. All accountancy learners successfully completed the apprenticeship programme. Success rates for advanced apprentices in accountancy and business administration, and apprentices in customer service and management are satisfactory. Success rates for advanced apprentices in customer service and business administration apprentice programmes are below the national average. The small number of learners on Train to Gain advanced management courses gained their qualification within the planned duration.
- Learners develop good occupational and personal skills. They demonstrate improved working practices and increase their confidence and self-esteem. Many learners greatly improve their knowledge and understanding of their job roles and those of colleagues. Employers report that learners demonstrate increased skill levels and greater competence in work tasks. Learners increase their employability.
- Progression for learners is good. Co-ordinated progression routes allow learners to progress to higher level programmes within their occupational area and into other subject areas. Many learners continue onto higher level apprenticeships and other qualifications which support their career progression. Most learners are enthusiastic, well motivated and enjoy their learning.
- Learners feel safe. They have a satisfactory understanding of safety procedures within their workplace. Employers have effective health and safety and equality policies in place. Learners receive comprehensive information on safeguarding at their induction. However, some assessors do not always reinforce learners' understanding and application of internet and personal safety during reviews.
- Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Assessors successfully help learners to identify their learning and what they need to do to improve further. However, others focus too much on recording the completion of workplace tasks with insufficient guidance for learners on how to further develop their knowledge and skills. Teaching and learning in formal accountancy sessions are particularly good.
- Assessors make effective use of a wide range of assessment methods, preparing learners thoroughly for assessment and to confirm and check learning. Online assessment portfolios are used well to support learner progress. Written feedback to learners is often very detailed and constructive in

helping the learner to improve. However, some immediate verbal feedback is brief and superficial.

- Monitoring of progress is satisfactory. Some assessors complete progress reviews in great detail, encouraging the learners to reflect on their work practices and help them to link the skills and knowledge they have developed to the qualification criteria. Target setting for learning is satisfactory. However, many targets are insufficiently focused to enable the learner to progress more quickly.
- Initial assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy needs is satisfactory. Where low levels of literacy or numeracy skills are identified additional learning support is provided in the workplace by a dedicated support tutor. Sessions are well prepared and engage learners in a good range of activities to help improve their skills.
- Learning resources are satisfactory. Accommodation at the provider's centres is good, providing computer access for learners. Textbooks are provided for accountancy learners. A very good range of generic and occupationally-specific online resources are available to learners through the electronic NVQ system. Assessors use digital and video cameras to support assessment and can provide learners with laptops to support learning.
- Programmes meet the needs of employers and learners well. ISIS works closely with employers to ensure that learning programmes are well matched to the needs of the workplace. Consultations between staff, employers and the learner identify the most appropriate learning programme. Timing of training and assessment is planned to suit both the learners' and employers' needs.
- ISIS has good partnerships with employers. Staff have built very positive partnerships with local employers. Employers are very supportive of learners and are keen for them to succeed. Communication is good and assessors provide employers with regular information about learners' progress. Employers have a high level of trust and regard for assessors who work well with supervisors to support learners. Learners benefit from managers' involvement in planning learning.
- Support for learners is satisfactory. Most learners receive accurate initial advice and guidance about which learning programme to follow. However, a few are unclear about the nature and content of their programme and what they have to do to complete the qualification. Learners receive very effective support for personal problems. In these cases, assessors provide intensive personal coaching to help increase confidence and self-esteem.
- Operational management of programmes is satisfactory. There is a supportive culture and staff share a clear aspiration to improve. Staff effectively share good practice and discuss individual learner issues. However, performance targets for staff are too general and do not emphasise areas of low achievement sufficiently. Data are used insufficiently to monitor programmes and identify actions to improve learner achievement.
- Promotion and reinforcement of equality and diversity are good. Induction is thorough and well-delivered. Most learners are clear about the appeals and

complaints processes. Assessors demonstrate good knowledge about equality and diversity issues and have regular discussions to promote and extend learners' knowledge. During progress reviews, appropriate discussion topics help learners to develop their understanding of relevant issues.

What does ISIS need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates for apprenticeships by better use of data to set targets and focus on the progress of learners towards all parts of their frameworks.
- Increase the focus on learning and skill development in workplace coaching to ensure learners make good progress.
- Better reinforce internet and personal safety in reviews to ensure learners use safe working practices in their training programmes.
- Improve target setting for learners and increase the use of short-term goals to identify and plan their learning and progress.
- Develop more subject specialists to focus on improving learning and raising achievement across all programmes.

Information about the inspection

34. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's operations manager, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the funding body, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

35. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in two of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Lincoln Academy Ltd t/a ISIS Training
Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16 – 18 Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners	0	0	0
Part-time learners	251	60	191
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	3		
Outcomes for learners	3	2	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	3		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	2		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3		
Leadership and management	3		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a		
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	2		
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2		
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	3		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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