

In-Comm Training Services

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 50139

Name of lead inspector: Phil Romain HMI

Last day of inspection: 13 May 2011

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Unit 12
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Information about the provider

1. In-Comm Training Services Limited (In-Comm), based in Walsall, was established in 1982. It comprises two businesses: In-Comm Training Services Ltd and In-Comm Business Services Ltd. Both companies operate from the same premises, operate to the same quality system and utilise the same staff. Two operational managers, who report to the two directors, have overall management responsibility for training programmes. In-Comm is funded by the Skills Funding Agency for apprenticeships in engineering and manufacturing technologies, warehouse and distribution, business administration, management, and information technology. In addition In-Comm provides Train to Gain programmes on behalf of the Black Country Services and Technology Consortium. Approximately 80% of In-Comm's business is public funded training.
2. At the time of inspection there were 446 learners. About 25% of train to gain learners live and work out of the region, as far as Bristol and Scunthorpe. In-Comm also provides training for a young apprenticeship programme with a local school. Engineering training to level 2, including the technical certificate and key skills, is provided at its own training centre.
3. The unemployment rate in Walsall is 7.4% compared to the national rate of 7.9% and the proportion of school leavers achieving 5 GCSE passes in 2009/10 was 65.7% compared to the average for England of 74.8%.
4. In-Comm provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - Willenhall School
 - The Black Country Services and Technology Consortium
5. The following organisation provides training on behalf of In-Comm:
 - Sutton College
 - Tamworth College
 - Wolverhampton College

| Type of provision | Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10 |
|--|--|
| Provision for young learners: 14 to16 | 20 part-time learners |
| Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships | 483 learners 62 apprentices |

Summary report

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

| Overall effectiveness of provision | | Grade 3 |
|--|--|---------|
| Capacity to improve | | Grade 3 |
| | | Grade |
| Outcomes for learners | | 3 |
| Quality of provision | | 3 |
| Leadership and management | | 3 |
| Safeguarding | | 2 |
| Equality and diversity | | 3 |
| Subject Areas | | Grade |
| Engineering and manufacturing technologies | | 3 |
| Business administration and law | | 3 |

Overall effectiveness

6. Provision at In-Comm is satisfactory. Success rates are broadly average although a significant minority of apprentices do not complete their programmes on time. Learners develop good personal and vocational skills and are prepared well for further study or for employment.
7. Learners enjoy their training, feel safe and are well supported. Training and assessment are satisfactory. Taught sessions are satisfactory but often lack pace and resources for computer aided design are inadequate. Provision at In-Comm meets the needs of learners and employers well. It makes effective use of its partnerships with local business and other organisations to provide learners with employment opportunities and relevant training. Partnerships have been particularly effective in developing the Train to Gain provision.
8. Managers at In-Comm have been effective in rectifying the declining performance of apprenticeships although this has taken longer than would be expected. Staff appropriately monitor learner's achievements but do not set adequate long term targets and milestones in order to accurately monitor progress. Staff, who know their learners well, provide good support. The self-assessment process is well established but understates some key weaknesses in

performance and is insufficiently inclusive. The self assessment report is broadly accurate but overly descriptive in parts.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection in 2007 overall success rates for apprentices have declined significantly, although they have now begun to improve. The number of apprentices whom complete on time has risen slightly but remains below the national average. Success rates for Train to Gain learners have improved significantly, as has the number who complete on time.
- Learners develop good vocational skills. In the workplace they take good advantage of the opportunities available to develop their competence, confidence and skills. Engineering learners gain additional relevant qualifications and business learners are able to deliver reliable customer service to their clients. Many learners take on increased levels of responsibility at work, including widened job roles, and in a few cases gaining promotion.
- Training and assessment are satisfactory. Employers provide learners with effective training in the workplace. Assessment is frequent and workplace visits are flexible to meet employers' and learners' needs. Learners' portfolios are generally well-presented and contain good evidence of competence. Classroom based teaching sessions are satisfactory overall.
- The monitoring of learners' progress is satisfactory. Learner's benefit from regular and well informed reviews of their progress, however, long term target setting is inadequate. Learners have insufficient clear milestones to check and measure their own progress. A minority of employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learners' training during progress reviews.
- The range of provision meets the needs and interests of learners and employers well. Apprenticeships and a range of intermediate and advanced level qualifications for employed workers support local businesses well. A young apprenticeship programme is effective in promoting engineering and attracting young people to the sector. Increasing numbers of apprentices are progressing on to advanced apprenticeships.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are good. Good additional learning support is provided to learners ensuring their basic skills needs are met. Assessors provide effective ongoing support with flexible assessment arrangements to meet employer needs. Learners appreciate the facility to contact assessors between assessments by telephone and email. Careers advice and guidance is good.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. In-Comm's directors set a clear strategic direction that is understood well by staff. Business targets are effectively cascaded to individual performance targets which are now closely monitored through the staff appraisal system. Communications are good. Operational management is satisfactory.
- In-Comm's arrangements for safeguarding are good. It carries out thorough health and safety checks and risk assessments of its employers' premises. In-

Comm manages e-safety well within its own centre, including appropriate policies on the use of social networking for staff, but has yet to systematically include e-safety within the curriculum.

- Arrangements to promote equality and diversity are satisfactory. Equality and diversity are covered comprehensively at induction and are effectively reinforced during progress reviews. In-Comm has taken a variety of steps to encourage learners from under-represented groups, however, these have yet to prove effective. There are no significant gaps in performance between different groups, however In-Comm does not routinely monitor this.
- Engagement with users to support and promote improvement is underdeveloped. In-Comm has attempted to gather the views of learners and employers through questionnaires and face-to-face meetings but has yet to establish a routine system for this. Learners have insufficient opportunity to inform decision making in the organisation.
- Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. However, the observation of teaching and learning overly focuses on compliance to a check list and this does not result in challenging actions to extend and improve staff performance. The internal verification system is effective in ensuring that assessment is robust. The self assessment report, although generally accurate, is insufficiently inclusive and overstates some important aspects of performance.
- In-Comm provides satisfactory value for money. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory and the quality of provision is satisfactory. Resources are satisfactory and learners benefit from a good range of high quality work placements. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced. In-Comm has a satisfactory commitment to sustainability.

What does In-Comm need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates further by setting clear milestones for progress and taking timely and decisive action when learners begin to fall behind.
- Improve the standard of teaching and learning by making better use of the results of observing staff, challenging them to aspire to better teaching and to further develop their teaching skills.
- Increase learners' knowledge and understanding of e-safety by ensuring all learners receive clear teaching on the subject as early as possible in their programme.
- Ensure that all learners continue to have an equal opportunity to succeed by routinely monitoring the success of different groups and where necessary take action to reduce and gaps.
- Involve learners and employers more in informing improvements and formal decision-making processes by developing and implementing an effective user engagement strategy.
- Improve the accuracy and usefulness of self-assessment by including the results of all quality monitoring activities and the views of learners and employers.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the good support from assessors and training staff both during and out of hours
- the increased knowledge and skills they develop
- being able to work at their own pace
- gaining a recognised qualification
- feeling safe.

What learners would like to see improved:

- to have more time at work for training and to collect evidence for their qualifications
- to have a quicker response to e-mails from In-Comm staff
- to have terminology in the qualification explained better.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- that training is relevant and tailored to the business
- the useful skills and knowledge learners gain which add value to the business
- the support and flexible approach of assessors.

What employers would like to see improved:

- better motivated learners to accelerate their progress
- more progression opportunities for learners
- the opportunity for learners to gain a wider experience of the sector by having work placements in other companies.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

9. In-Comm has satisfactory capacity to improve. It has maintained many of the key strengths of the previous inspection, although success rates for apprentices have declined significantly. Train to gain success rates have improved and are now good. Two of the key areas for improvement have been remedied, but it has been slow to improve the number of apprentices who complete on time. In response to declining success rates the directors restructured the business and introduced two new management posts. Although improvements have been slow to realise, apprentice success rates are now improving and in some cases are good. In-Comm has a clear strategic direction that is linked effectively to local and national priorities. Quality improvement arrangements are effective in maintaining standards, particularly the standard of learners work, but do not sufficiently promote further improvements. The self-assessment process, although insufficiently inclusive, does lead to an appropriate quality improvement plan. The self-assessment report gives a generally accurate view of the provision, but understates the importance of learner's success and over grades provision.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

10. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection in 2007 overall success rates for apprentices have declined significantly, although they have now begun to improve. The number of apprentices whom complete on time has risen slightly but remains below the national average. Success rates for Train to Gain learners have improved significantly and are high. The proportion of Train to Gain learners who complete on time has also improved and is high. There are no significant differences in performance between different groups of learners. Most apprentices progress at the expected rate, however a significant minority are making slow progress.
11. Learners enjoy their training and develop good vocational skills. In the workplace they take good advantage of the opportunities available to develop their skills. Engineering learners gain additional, relevant qualifications and business learners are able to deliver reliable customer service to their clients. Many learners take on increased levels of responsibility at work, including widened job roles, and in a few cases gaining promotion. Learners are highly valued by their employers. Portfolios are well structured and learners' written work is to a good standard. Business administration learners produce good quality well researched portfolio evidence that demonstrates relevant knowledge and skills. Engineering portfolios contain a wide range of relevant evidence including photographs. Learners say that they feel safe and readily apply safe working practices.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

12. Training and assessment are satisfactory. Employers provide learners with a good range of experiences and support them well in the development of their skills and knowledge. Practical and theory lessons are satisfactory overall. Trainers use their engineering experience and knowledge effectively to impart knowledge. However, some teaching lacks pace and teaching resources for computer-aided design are inadequate. Assessment is robust and accurate. Assessment of learners' work is frequent and workplace visits are flexible to meet employers' and learner's needs. The majority of learners are encouraged to develop independent learning skills and cross reference their own workplace evidence. However, in a minority of cases this is done by the assessor instead of the learner.
13. Progress reviews are regular and effective in monitoring learners' achievements. However, inadequate long term target setting hinders accurate monitoring of progress against milestones. Staff make appropriate use of feedback from employers to identify learners' progress and agree the actions needed to improve. However, not all employers are sufficiently involved in progress review meetings. Staff monitor and extend learners' understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity well during reviews.
14. Programmes meet the needs and interests of learners and employers well. Apprenticeships are available in engineering, business administration, customer service, business improvement, management, warehousing, and information technology. A wide range of related qualifications are offered on the Train to Gain programme. The young apprenticeship is effective in encouraging young people into engineering programmes. Apprenticeships provide learners with good employment opportunities and many progress to higher level qualifications and positions of responsibility.
15. In-Comm has productive partnerships with local employers, schools, colleges and the Lifelong Learning Alliance. Employers provide good working environments for learners and support them well. The well established partnership with one local school to promote engineering through the young apprenticeship is very effective. Partnerships with community groups and other schools are satisfactory. Well co-ordinated partnerships have been particularly effective in developing the business administration Train to Gain provision, promoting sustainable development well in the Walsall area.
16. Learners receive good care, guidance and support. Staff have a good understanding of their learners' needs and offer effective support to help reduce barriers to success. Learners have good access to staff for help and support, including a dedicated member of staff identified as the apprentice 'buddy'. Learners feel supported and have appropriate access to staff by telephone and email. Most staff respond in good time when learners request help. Careers advice and guidance is good.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Leadership and management are satisfactory. In-Comm's directors set a clear strategic direction which staff understand well. The organisation works effectively with a wide range of employers to provide apprenticeships and training for employers' staff. Business targets are effectively cascaded to individual performance targets which are now closely monitored through the staff appraisal system. Communications are good and staff speak positively about their involvement in business planning and their greater awareness of learners' progress through regular team meetings. Operational management is satisfactory. Staff development is satisfactory, although In-Comm has been slow to support trainers in gaining up-to-date teaching qualifications.
18. In-Comm's arrangements for safeguarding are good. It carries out thorough health and safety checks and risk assessments of its employers' premises and takes appropriate action if learners are at risk of harm. It provides learners with training in health and safety and has introduced discussion around topics such as drug and alcohol abuse and sexual health during progress reviews. Recently established links with the local health trust have resulted in useful training for staff and learners on healthy living. In-Comm has ensured that relevant staff have had enhanced CRB checks, which are recorded in a single central record. Although access to the internet is controlled in the training centre and e-safety is now a topic of discussion at progress reviews, it is not sufficiently prioritised to ensure that all learners have an adequate awareness early in their programme. In-Comm has a very clear policy on safeguarding which includes the non-use of social networking for staff and has introduced CCTV in areas where learners may be vulnerable.
19. In-Comm's has satisfactory arrangements to promote and monitor equality and diversity. Equality and diversity are covered comprehensively at induction and are reinforced during progress reviews. In-Comm has introduced some effective visual resources to prompt discussion with learners at progress reviews about a range of equality and diversity subjects and this is proving effective in extending learners understanding. All staff have attended relevant equality and diversity training which is updated annually. There is no significant difference in the performance of different groups of learners however managers do not systematically monitor this. In-Comm has taken a variety of steps to encourage learners from under-represented groups, including establishing links with community groups and local schools. However these have not proved effective.
20. In-Comm has yet to establish a reliable and systematic way to gather and use the views of learners and employers to inform improvements. It has tried a number of ways to gather views, including questionnaires and face-to-face meetings, but these have not been entirely successful. A trainee council for first year apprentices in the centre provides a useful way for those apprentices to engage with the decision making process. Learner and employer views are considered during progress reviews but these are not collated into a formal analysis of views or systematically used to inform improvements.

21. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. Managers and staff monitor targets and learner progress at regular team meetings. A small team of auditors routinely observe key training processes, including teaching and learning, assessment and progress reviews. However these observations overly focus on compliance, do not result in challenging actions to extend and improve staff performance, and are not adequately used to inform self-assessment. The self-assessment process identified many key strengths and areas for improvement but failed to recognise the significance of the decline in apprentices' success rates and overstated the organisations effectiveness. The internal verification system is effective in ensuring that assessment is robust.
22. In-Comm provides satisfactory value for money. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory and the quality of provision is satisfactory. Resources are satisfactory and learners benefit from high quality work placements. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced. In-Comm has a satisfactory commitment to sustainability.

Subject areas

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Grade 3

Context

23. At the time of inspection there were 41 apprentices and 118 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Intermediate apprentices, many of whom begin their programme without employment, attend off-the-job training at In-Comm's centre. Advanced apprentices train at their place of work and attend a local college for their technical certificate. In-Comm also provides training for 14-16 year-old learners from a local school as part of a young apprenticeship. At the time of inspection there were 15 young apprentices.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Success rates for apprentices are just below the national average but are low for advanced apprentices. The number of apprentices who complete on time is about average overall but is very low for the small number of advanced apprentices. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are high and a significant proportion complete within the agreed timescales.
- Learners, particularly apprentices, gain a good range of additional qualifications. This includes qualifications in health and safety, the use of abrasive wheels, manual handling, welding and forklift truck operation. Many learners have the opportunity to progress to higher level qualifications on completion of their programme.
- Learners enjoy their training and gain good workplace skills. Employers speak highly of the skills and knowledge learners gain and feel comfortable giving learners more responsibilities as their skills increase. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is good overall.
- In-Comm places a strong emphasis on the safety of its learners. Learners say that they feel safe and readily apply safe working practices in the centre and at work. Staff reinforced safe working practices well during training sessions and during workplace progress reviews.
- Training and learning are satisfactory. Employers provide learners with a good range of experiences and support them well in the development of skills in the workplace. Practical and theory lessons are satisfactory overall. Trainers use their engineering experience and knowledge effectively to impart knowledge, however, some teaching lacks pace. Assessment is robust and accurate.
- Progress reviews are regular and effective in monitoring learners' achievements, however, inadequate long term target setting hinders accurate monitoring of progress against milestones. Staff monitor learners understanding of health and safety and equality and diversity well during reviews. Not all employers are sufficiently involved in progress review meetings.

- The range and content of programmes meets the needs and interest of learners and employers well. The young apprenticeship is effective in encouraging young people into engineering programmes. Apprenticeships provide learners with good skills and employment with many progressing to higher level qualifications and positions of responsibility. The Train to gain programme meets the need of employers well.
- Partnerships with employers and schools are effective. Employers provide good working environments for learners and support them well. The well established partnership with one local school to promote engineering through the young apprenticeship is good. Partnerships with community groups and other schools are satisfactory.
- Care, guidance and support for learners is good. Assessors know their learners well and provide good informal support both during regular visits to the workplace and at other times when needed. Learners have good access to staff for help and support, including an apprentice 'buddy'.
- The management of engineering programmes is satisfactory overall. The self-assessment process is reasonably accurate but over grades the area. Communications are good and staff are well involved in planning and monitoring performance. Arrangements to promote and monitor equality and diversity are satisfactory. Internal verification is effective.
- Overall resources are satisfactory. However learners do not have access to large enough computer screens on computer aided design courses.

What does In-Comm need to do to improve further?

- Improve success rates for advanced apprentices by setting clear long term targets and milestones and taking timely and decisive action when learners begin to fall behind.
- Improve the standard of teaching and learning by fully implementing plans to further develop and extend teachers' qualifications.
- Improve the usefulness of progress reviews by encouraging better attendance and support from all employers.
- Improve the computing facilities in the training centre by providing sufficiently large screen for learners on CAD courses.

Business administration and law

Grade 3

Context

24. Currently, 111 learners are studying a range of business administration programmes at level 2 and 3. One hundred learners are on a Train to Gain programme, 9 are intermediate apprentices and 2 are advanced apprentices. Nineteen learners are female. One learner is of mixed racial heritage. All learners are employed and all training and assessment is provided in the workplace.

Key findings

- Overall outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Apprentice success rates were below the national average in 2009/10. The number of Train to Gain learners who completed on time was about the national average. Current success rates for apprenticeships have improved to about the national average. The number of Train to Gain learners who complete on time has increased significantly this year and is now high.
- Most apprentices progress at the expected rate, however a significant minority are making slow progress. Key skills training is introduced too late in programmes.
- Learners achieve good vocational and personal skills. They develop a range of effective paper-based and electronic administrative skills. Learners in sales are able to deliver reliable customer service to their clients. They produce good quality researched portfolio evidence that demonstrates relevant knowledge and skills. Portfolios are well structured and learners' written work is presented to a good standard.
- Learners benefit from good work opportunities to practice their administrative and service skills. Many have progressed further in their employment whilst being on the apprenticeship programme. This includes widened job roles and in a few cases gaining promotion. Generally learners are well motivated, enthusiastic and enjoy their learning. They have good records of attendance and timekeeping.
- Learners have a good understanding of safety and adopt safe working practices at work. Learners knowledge and awareness of healthy living is satisfactory and enables them to make informed choices about their health and well-being.
- Assessors deliver structured and purposeful assessments. A wide range of assessment methods are used. Generally, short-term targets are clear and understood by learners. Assessors effectively review and update previous plans. The majority of learners are encouraged to develop independent learning skills and cross reference their workplace evidence independently.
- Long term target setting is inadequate. Individual learning plans have either no completion targets set, or all parts of the programme have the same end dates. Learners have no clear milestones to monitor and measure their own progress.

- The range of provision adequately meets the needs and interests of learners. Apprenticeships and advanced apprenticeships are available in business administration and customer service, as well as a range of supervisory and management qualifications. Increasing numbers of apprentices are progressing on to advanced apprenticeships. A minority of employers are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learners' training.
- In-Comm has productive partnerships links with local employers, colleges and the Lifelong Learning Alliance. These well co-ordinated partnerships have been particularly effective in developing the business administration Train to Gain provision, promoting sustainable development well in the Walsall area. Work-based learning employers have a good understanding of their learners' programmes and what they need to do.
- Learners receive good additional learning support ensuring their basic skills needs are met. Assessors provide effective ongoing support with flexible arrangements to meet employers' needs. Learners appreciate the facility to contact assessors between assessments by telephone and email. Assessors provide good advice on how learners can continue their learning with many progressing on to higher qualifications.
- Leadership and management is satisfactory. Managers meet weekly to discuss performance and reviews. Actions to address declining apprentice success rates have been successful in improving performance this year. Staff are aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and procedures to protect learners are effective. Learners have an appropriate understanding of equality and diversity and recognise this when dealing with customers and colleagues.
- Arrangements to quality assure and improve provision are satisfactory. The self-assessment process is reasonably accurate. Data are used adequately to track learners progress. Appropriate plans are in place to address underperformance and increase success rates. The internal verification of assessment is robust and effective in maintaining standards.

What does In-Comm need to do to improve further?

- Continue to increase apprenticeship success rates by fully implementing arrangements to monitor and evaluate outcomes and tackle underperformance.
- Accelerate the progress of apprentices by setting challenging medium and long term targets and milestones, using these to accurately indentify progress and taking timely corrective action when necessary.
- Better engage employers in planning and monitoring learners progress by ensuring they are fully involved in learners' progress reviews.

Information about the inspection

25. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's Managing Director as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of In-Comm's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, the previous inspection report, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas In-Comm offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**In-Comm Training Services**

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 | Employer responsive |
|--|----------|---------------------|
| Approximate number of enrolled learners | | |
| Full-time learners | 72 | 72 |
| Part-time learners | 374 | 374 |
| Overall effectiveness | 3 | 3 |
| Capacity to improve | 3 | |
| Outcomes for learners | 3 | 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? | 2 | |
| How safe do learners feel? | 2 | |
| <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i> | n/a | |
| <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i> | n/a | |
| Quality of provision | 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? | 3 | |
| How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve? | 2 | |
| Leadership and management | 3 | 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? | 3 | |
| How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement? | 3 | |
| 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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