

In-Comm Training Services Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		23 – 26 October 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Engineering apprentices make good progress and a high proportion achieve their framework qualifications.
- Apprentices develop good vocational skills that are valued by their employers and enhance their future employment prospects.
- Teaching, learning, individual coaching and assessment are good and delivered by well qualified and commercially experienced trainers and assessors.
- Support for apprentices at work and in the training centre is good resulting in the development of good personal and social skills and in improved confidence.
- The processes for observing teaching and learning are rigorous and help to develop staff and provide improved experiences for apprentices.
- Assessment is regular, frequent and thorough and maintains apprentices' focus on skills development and on overall achievement.
- The recruitment process is effective and the matching of apprentices to employers is good.
- Managers use good performance management processes to monitor the performance of staff and the progress of apprentices against agreed targets systematically.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- It does not have a track record of apprentice success rates consistently above national averages.
- Too few teaching sessions are outstanding.
- Administration apprentices do not receive well-structured and flexible off-the-job group training sessions to provide the theory requirements and allow group interaction to share views and give a broader experience of work.
- The promotion and recording of equality and diversity need to be embedded into all components of the apprenticeship framework.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of written feedback to engineering apprentices so that it is more detailed and informative.
- Ensure all apprentices are aware of their target dates for completion of the key elements of the programme.
- Provide well-structured and flexible off-the-job group training sessions for administration apprentices to teach the programme's theory requirements and allow group interactions for sharing views and experiences of work.
- Make better use of technology in the assessment of administration apprentices to provide a more stimulating range of evidence collection and observation statements.
- Use individual learning plans more effectively to plan work, set targets and track short-term goal achievement.
- Use the progress reviews for administration apprentices to discuss the learning that has taken place as well as the achievement of qualifications.
- Promote and record equality and diversity more effectively throughout all components of the apprenticeship frameworks.
- Set business targets and implement plans to increase the recruitment of people from under-represented groups onto apprenticeship programmes.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Outcomes for apprentices at In-Comm are good. In 2008/09 overall success rates were above the national average. However in 2009/10 and 2010/11 success rates declined to below the national average. Data for 2011/12 show that overall success rates and success rates within the planned time have improved and are significantly above the national average.
- The decline in success rates for apprentices was partly caused by many apprentices being made redundant due to the economic downturn. Low numbers of administration apprentices resulted in redundancies having a major impact on success rates. In-Comm has been proactive in supporting unemployed apprentices and helping them to find new employment to complete their qualifications where possible. All apprentices who remain on the programme successfully complete their framework.
- A minority of advanced apprentices have not made sufficient progress with their qualifications at work and have not achieved within the planned time. In most cases the employers have not allowed sufficient time or opportunity for apprentices to generate the evidence required to complete their qualifications during busy periods at work.
- Managers are narrowing achievement gaps of the advanced apprentices by successfully addressing the slow progress issues. They hold effective monthly meetings with each employer to review the apprentice's progress and discuss their short and long-term targets. Employer training agreements have been revised to reinforce the need for employers to allow apprentices the time and the opportunities to achieve their progression targets. The agreements contain penalties for non-compliances and successfully result in more active participation in the training by employers.

- The majority of apprentices progress from intermediate apprenticeships to advanced apprenticeships and into sustained employment. They acquire good personal, vocational, and social skills during their training and quickly gain good confidence levels whilst working in the workplace. Apprentices' progress is good with around 10% of engineering apprentices progressing onto higher-level qualifications that include foundation degrees.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Apprentices receive good training and assessment, as reflected in the good outcomes for learners, and they quickly develop good employment skills and improved confidence. In-Comm staff have high expectations of apprentices and provide good support to help motivate them to achieve. Standards of apprentices' work are good and engineering apprentices quickly master the complex and technical work skills that their programmes require. However the administration training is not sufficiently well planned as assessors do not record training or learning needs on individual learning plans. Training needs are not sufficiently well identified and met.
- Engineering apprentices access a wide range of additional qualifications at no additional cost to their employers. They undertake specialist courses tailored to meet employers' needs, such as fitting abrasive wheels and fork lift truck operator licence.
- Off-the job teaching and learning for engineering apprentices is good. It is well planned and delivered by commercially experienced and well qualified tutors. However, tutors do not always direct questions to individual learners to check their learning which results in some apprentices not being fully involved in sessions. Administration apprentices benefit from good workplace training. Individual coaching, learning and assessment is adequately provided at work by In-Comm assessors. However, there are too few opportunities to access structured theoretical off-the-job training as part of a group to allow interactions with others.
- Assessment is thorough and fair. Assessors provide good workplace coaching and support for apprentices and set clear progression targets.
- Monthly apprentice progress checks are carried out with each employer and In-Comm staff conduct extensive formal reviews every three months. The reviews are thorough and detailed covering all aspects of the apprentices' framework requirements. Apprentices identified as making slow progress are supported well and plans are quickly put in place to ensure they receive any individual help required to complete their programmes on time.
- The teaching and learning of English and mathematics, which is integrated well into engineering theory sessions, supports apprentices in developing the higher-level skills they require in their work roles. Apprentices who require support with English and mathematics to achieve their learning goals receive focused additional help.
- Apprentices benefit from the good range of advice and guidance for their next steps in learning. In-Comm and employers are knowledgeable about the options and the requirements open to apprentices. All are closely involved in ensuring that the arrangements for apprenticeship programmes meet the needs and requirements of the employers' business and benefit the apprentice in meeting their framework requirements.
- In-Comm clearly meets the needs of engineering employers and the training programmes are well managed. Both the apprentices and the employers benefit from the very flexible training programmes that clearly fit the requirements in up-skilling and training employers' workforces.
- Tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified and well-experienced in their occupational sector. Their teaching, coaching and assessment skills are developed through In-Comm providing the necessary training and qualification opportunities. Tutors are able to use good examples from their own experiences to illustrate the practical application of theoretical knowledge and understanding in the workplace. Assessors draw on their good subject

knowledge and awareness of the qualification standards to make accurate assessments of performance.

- Managers regularly observe teaching, learning, coaching and assessments for improvement purposes. The process successfully leads to staff developing their abilities and benefits apprentice's experiences.
- Apprentices have good knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity issues. Staff use information sheets at progress reviews to highlight topical equality or diversity issues. However apprentices' understanding is not sufficiently checked or recorded during reviews and opportunities to promote equality and diversity are not fully incorporated into the training programmes.

Engineering

Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good which reflects the good outcomes for engineering. Tutors and assessors provide particularly good guidance and support and help apprentices to make significant progress. They encourage apprentices to gain additional qualifications and to maximise their career opportunities. The majority of apprentices progress from the intermediate to the advanced level apprenticeship.
- Apprentices' portfolios of assessment evidence demonstrate that they use a high level of skills in employers' workshops and build on their previous experience through work on industrial standard equipment. They develop a good range of industry-related skills and produce work to a high standard during their on-the-job training in employers' workshops.
- Tutors set clear aims and objectives, use a good range of teaching strategies and provide clear individual coaching. During the well-managed theory sessions, apprentices work effectively. Teaching is well paced with clear, well-structured presentations by knowledgeable staff. Apprentices demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject and maintain their interest and motivation. However, tutors do not always direct questions to individual learners which results in some apprentices not being fully involved in the sessions.
- Apprentices benefit from the challenging and realistic expectations that In-Comm staff and employers have of them. They are expected to achieve more than the apprenticeship requirements by developing additional skills and qualifications for their jobs. In-Comm provides a wide range of additional qualifications for apprentices that are in addition to the apprenticeship frameworks. However, a few apprentices are unaware of the timescales for completing various aspects of their framework requirements.
- Staff pay good attention to health and safety and the apprentices' welfare needs during progress reviews. For example, apprentices who smoke are offered smoking cessation support. Regular and thorough health and safety checks on employers' premises support the welfare of apprentices while training in the workplace. Good attention to safe working practices protects the apprentices and develops a strong awareness for their own safety in the workplace. In the provider's workshop, staff support new apprentices well, closely monitoring them when using machine tools for the first time and ensuring that they remain safe.
- In-Comm's well-managed training workshop has an appropriate range of engineering equipment to meet the apprentices' training needs. Engineering drawings are well presented and apprentices receive a useful range of engineering information to support their learning. Tracking and monitoring records of their individual progress are prominently displayed in the workshop to motivate and inspire apprentices.
- The initial assessment of English and mathematics is appropriate and further supported by a mechanical reasoning test to determine the level of engineering aptitude of potential

apprentices. Thorough tracking and monitoring of apprentices' progress takes place during their training both at In-Comm and at their employer's premises. During assessment sessions, challenging targets are set that builds on their knowledge and understanding of engineering applications.

- Assessment is accurate and fair. Assessors set clear targets and provide detailed verbal feedback to the apprentices during their assessment sessions. Assessors provide constructive encouragement and support apprentices well during assessment opportunities; they create good opportunities for apprentices to develop their knowledge and understanding of engineering applications. Apprentices receive clear verbal feedback on their performance. However, written feedback is too brief and less useful.
- Apprentices have a clear recollection of equality and diversity sessions at In-Comm. However, although equality and diversity are promoted and reinforced during their training programme the knowledge and understanding of apprentices is not checked thoroughly during progress reviews.

Administration

Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

- Coaching, learning and assessment provided for apprentices are adequate and, in line with success rates, are improving. Assessors visit the workplaces at least monthly and they carefully plan assessments to ensure apprentices make good progress. Apprentices and assessors are well-prepared for the visits. Assessment is thorough making good use of a range of evidence sources. Evidence portfolios are well-organised, clearly presented, and the standard of apprentices' work is high. However, assessors do not routinely make best use of technology, for example to produce observation statements, to record observations or discussions or for storing evidence.
- Apprentices benefit from good workplace training and as a result they soon extend the range of tasks they are able to carry out confidently. Progression into employment is good. Apprentices secure real or sustained employment during or on completion of their programmes. Many progress in their work roles and take on additional responsibilities.
- Apprentices gain a good understanding of the skills that underpin their roles, for example telephone skills, dealing with customers, and entering information into customer records. However the training is not planned sufficiently well. Assessors do not record training or learning needs on individual learning plans. Training needs are not sufficiently well identified and addressed.
- Assessors provide satisfactory coaching in the workplace. Apprentices are given appropriate workbooks, information hand-outs, electronic resources and textbooks to work on between assessor visits for directed or self-study. They carry out independent research to develop their underpinning knowledge. Apprentices may attend the centre for theory training. However, programmes focus too much on assessment rather than on the quality of learning. Too few opportunities are provided for apprentices to access theoretical training. Most apprentices interviewed would appreciate attending some off-the-job training for interaction with other apprentices. However, there is not enough structure or flexibility to the training offered at the training centre.
- Individual learning plans are adequate in identifying components for the framework qualifications and dates for achievement are satisfactorily recorded. Apprentices' choice of a good range of NVQ units reflects their work roles very well. Apprentices' targets focus on unit completion, functional skills or technical certificate tests and not on the learning that needs to

take place to achieve their short-term goals. Targets are not sufficiently well identified and recorded.

- Apprentices review their progress regularly and engage well in discussing what they have achieved. Assessors discuss assessment so that apprentices know how well they have done and what actions they need to take to improve. Apprentices find the action plans that assessors complete at each visit useful. Employers meet regularly with assessors during the workplace visits and review apprentices' progress well. However, the reviews focus on framework achievement and insufficiently on workplace training or the learning that has taken place.
- The standard of apprentices' written work in their portfolios is very good. Their personal statements are well-written to a high standard in English and spelling. Assessment of written work is good. Apprentices receive very clear and constructive advice on how they can improve further.
- The recruitment process is good and apprentices are well-matched to the work placements. Pre-placement interviews are thorough and adequately identify apprentices' starting points and potential. However, a few apprentices would benefit from initial training in areas such as team working, telephone techniques and organisational skills.
- Apprentices have a clear understanding of equality and diversity and can explain the relevance to their workplaces. Opportunities to challenge their perceptions, for example on ageism, are adequately explored by assessors. However, although the assessors provide interesting 'hot topics' information leaflets at progress reviews, the opportunity to promote wider diversity issues throughout the apprenticeship programme is missed.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Managers at In-Comm set high expectations of staff and apprentices through the company's business targets. The company's vision is communicated through the ambitious aims and objectives within the business plan. Clear targets derived from the aims and objectives are agreed with individuals and teams of staff and discussed twice a year at staff performance reviews.
- Employers have recently experienced difficult times with many closing and others having to reduce staff levels to survive. In-Comm has also had to reduce its workforce since the last inspection as many employers have had to make apprentices redundant. Success rates for apprentices have fallen in the last three years although apprentices who manage to stay in employment achieve their apprenticeship framework. There are signs of improvements with more employers recruiting apprentices and in-year success rates are good.
- In-Comm provides good leadership and management. The process for observing and improving teaching, learning and assessment is good. Observers are well trained and qualified in evaluating teaching and learning sessions. Staff are expected to achieve at least a good grade when being observed. If they receive a lower grade they undertake professional development until their performance has improved. Staff have arranged to carry out reciprocal lesson observations with other similar training providers to share best practice and verify observation results.
- Staff development is good. Staff appraisals are used well to review individual's performance against agreed targets and identify and agree any required training needs. Many staff have benefitted from professional update training to maintain their vocational skills, knowledge and credibility. All staff delivering teaching, training, coaching and assessment have recently achieved the latest recognised teaching qualifications required for their roles.
- The self-assessment process is effective. Opportunities are provided during staff training days for staff to assess their work against the Common Inspection Framework requirements and propose strengths and areas for improvement. Apprentices' and employers' views are used well to contribute to the report. Data are used effectively to justify some judgements. Development

planning following self-assessment is used very effectively to improve and further develop the provision.

- The planning and management of learning programmes are good. Managers regularly meet with staff to discuss if apprentices' progress is in line with agreed targets. Data are used very well to inform managers and staff about the progress of apprentices and highlight where corrective actions need to be taken.
- Most apprentices make good progress at work and develop highly effective vocational skills. Employers value the skills gained and provide good opportunities for apprentices to quickly become productive members of their workforce. However, administration apprentices do not have structured off-the-job training. In-Comm provides some individual training in the workplace for administration apprentices although this is mainly focussed on assessment and lacks the benefits that group interactions can provide.
- The In-Comm training centre is well resourced with an appropriate range of engineering training equipment to support teaching and learning. Flexible modes of attendance are offered at the training centre to meet the needs of employers and apprentices. Engineering apprentices enjoy attending the centre where they receive good practical and theoretical training.
- Apprentices receive suitable equality and diversity training at the start of their programme with clear information about company policies, procedures and expectations. Health and well-being courses on topics such as sexual health, smoking cessation and cancer awareness are provided and all apprentices are invited to attend. Those that attend enjoy the training and find the information beneficial.
- During progress reviews effective questioning of apprentices is carried out by assessors on their understanding of equality and diversity and about their treatment at work that checks and improves their understanding. However, the overall promotion and recording of equality and diversity throughout the programmes could be improved. On administration courses there is under-representation of apprentices from minority ethnic groups and there are too few women on engineering courses. No targets or improvement plans have been set to try to address the issues.
- Apprentices feel safe and are aware of their rights and responsibilities. Effective safeguarding training is provided for all apprentices during their initial apprenticeship induction. The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding apprentices and has good systems and processes in place to protect and to keep them healthy and safe in the workplace and at the training centre.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

In-Comm Training Services Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Other work- based learning	Employability	Foundation Learning	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2				2				
Outcomes for learners	2				2				
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2				2				
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2				2				

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Engineering	2
Administration	3

In-Comm Training Services Limited

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 154
	Part-time: N/A
Principal/CEO	Mr Colin Mills
Date of previous inspection	May 2011
Website address	www.in-comm.co.uk

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	25	28	26	35	0	0		
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> City of Wolverhampton College (one apprentice). 							

Additional socio-economic information

The provider's premises are situated near Walsall in the West Midlands and provides apprenticeship training mainly across the West Midlands region. The West Midlands region has a population of 5,455,200. Unemployment in the West Midlands is 8.6% which is above the national average. Youth unemployment in the area is high at 9.3%.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

John Grimmer HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Managing Director as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of apprentices and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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