

# In-Comm Training Services Ltd

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		11–15 May 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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:

- managers build very effective partnerships and use these to plan and develop the provision to meet very precisely the needs of small to medium sized engineering employers in the West Midlands
- senior managers provide good leadership, setting high expectations of staff and learners
- engineering success rates are improving well, and progress of current learners across all subject areas is good
- learners develop vocational skills and knowledge very well and produce a high standard of work
- employers are highly supportive and very active in planning workplace learning to meet learners' needs; engineering trainers use their good industry knowledge to tailor learning to meet learners' needs very effectively, making good use of the variety of equipment at the centre
- learners' engagement in learning and their motivation to achieve are high as a result of the good support from staff, who undertake frequent and effective workplace visits
- learners receive good information, advice and guidance, leading to good rates of progression to further learning and sustained employment.

### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- quality improvement planning to improve teaching, learning and assessment further, including the feedback given to staff following observations, is not sufficiently effective
- the provider does not yet have a sustained record of high success rates across all subject areas, particularly in business administration which has previously been too low
- learners do not sufficiently develop their English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills beyond the needs of functional skills qualifications, particularly with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar for administration learners
- the promotion of diversity does not sufficiently ensure all learners have a good understanding and how to apply this knowledge in the workplace.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the effectiveness of quality improvement planning by more detailed, specific and measurable actions to drive improvements, including in the feedback given to staff following observations, and by more robust monitoring of assessment practice in administration.
- Increase success rates for administration and ensure the good progress now being made by current learners is maintained.
- Better diagnose learners' skills in English, mathematics and ICT and use the results to plan learning and support needs more effectively to help learners improve these skills, even when they are exempt from functional skills qualifications.
- Provide more staff training in diversity to build their confidence in discussing this in sessions and at progress reviews, to ensure all learners develop a good understanding, including its relevance to the workplace.

### Inspection judgements

<b>Outcomes for learners</b>	Good
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- In-Comm Training Services Limited (In-Comm) offers an apprenticeship provision that focuses on meeting needs of small to medium-sized engineering employers. Of the current 195 apprentices on programme, the large majority are working towards engineering qualifications. A small minority of apprentices are working towards apprenticeships in administration, including some at non-engineering employers, and this area is also specifically graded. The subject areas of management and warehousing have very small learner numbers; these were sampled, but not given individual grades.
- Outcomes for learners are good. Although the provider does not yet have a sustained record of achievement, success rates for learners are improving well. On the largest programme, engineering, there was a significant improvement in 2013/14 to a level in line with other providers, while the rate of progress that learners made was much higher than in other similar providers. In the current year, there are reliable indications of further improvement in the proportion of learners achieving their apprenticeship.
- In business administration, success rates were low for apprentices in 2013/14, mostly due to learners leaving their employment. In the current year, learners are making good progress towards achieving their qualifications on time.
- On the small business management, customer service and warehousing programmes, success rates are good, and slightly above those of other similar providers. Provider data indicate a further slight improvement in the current year.
- The provider is closing an achievement gap well. During 2013/14, intermediate-level apprentices achieved less well than those on advanced programmes. In the current year, this gap is closing and both groups are achieving at a similar rate. There are no significant gaps between different genders or ethnic minority groups. The small number of learners with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve at a higher rate than those without thanks to good support.
- Learners make good progress in the development of vocational skills and knowledge. Learners in engineering learn how to work to high levels of accuracy, with good health and safety practices, and with confidence in the use of milling and turning equipment. They produce a good standard of work, such as making good quality pipework and specialist steels. In administration, learners produce good-quality business documents, and improve their customer service skills, including telephone use. Learners make good progress in their jobs, taking on more responsibilities; for

example, one administration learner now has specific responsibility for preparing payroll and tax returns. Engineering learners gain increased responsibility, taking charge of teams in their workplace.

- Achievement of additional qualifications in the larger engineering programme is very good. All learners, when starting their intermediate apprenticeship, achieve extra qualifications valuable for their employment prospects, in manual handling, working safely, slinging and using abrasive wheels.
- Rates of progression to a higher-level qualification are good in engineering. In the current year, the large majority of advanced apprentices have progressed from an intermediate-level apprenticeship. In business administration, a small minority progress to level 3.
- Progression to permanent employment is good. Learners are employed on a permanent contract, rather than an apprenticeship employment contract; after the apprenticeship, those who achieve their qualification remain in employment.
- The large majority of learners pass their functional skills tests at the first attempt. However, learners do not further develop these essential employability skills beyond the requirements of these qualifications.

### **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, ensuring that most learners make good progress and successfully achieve their qualifications. Learners are motivated by the enthusiasm of staff and enjoy the challenging activities that they are set, gaining in confidence and resilience. They value their trainers' vocational expertise and apply successfully the knowledge they have acquired in the workplace. In warehousing, learners share their knowledge with colleagues and managers to improve business efficiency. Learners benefit from a good range of additional qualifications that increases their workplace skills including manual handling and fitting abrasive wheels.
- Learners benefit from trainers' high, but realistic, expectations. Trainers mostly set challenging goals for learners in lessons that are designed to develop diagnostic, problem-solving and team-working skills. For example, in a very effective welding lesson, learners used destructive and non-destructive tests to evaluate the strengths of each of their welds. Workplace supervisors are keen to move learners on to more complex tasks as soon as they are ready. For example, one learner has been asked to develop a test rig for pneumatic equipment. In a minority of theory lessons, trainers do not ensure learners are working hard enough, particularly the more able. The more able apprentices find tasks and activities undemanding and struggle to maintain interest and concentration.
- Resources are good for both on- and off-the-job training and are continually being developed and updated to reflect changes in industry. For example, specialist welding, hydraulics and pneumatics plant and tooling, as well as computers, have been purchased to reflect the needs of industry and employers' needs. Staff are suitably qualified and have good knowledge and experience of current industry practice. Learners have access to an appropriate range of electronic learning resources. However, trainers and assessors are not using interactive learning technologies imaginatively to extend learning beyond the classroom so that learners make even better progress.
- Personal support is good, and learners are confident to approach staff should they need this support. Good relationships between staff, learners and employers lead to well-co-ordinated support that removes barriers and provides learners with very good opportunities for rapid progress within their programme.
- Assessment is frequent and rigorous for the majority of learners. Assessors use questioning well to encourage learners to reflect on their learning and to test learners' knowledge and understanding. In administration, comprehensive and useful verbal feedback clearly informs learners what they need to do in order to improve. However, written feedback often provides

praise but lacks a thorough evaluation of what the learner has achieved. In a minority of cases, written targets do not sufficiently capture all the areas for improvement that were discussed.

- Assessors visit the workplace frequently to review learners' progress, carry out assessments and discuss learners' development with employers. As a result, employers are able to provide the opportunities at work that learners need in order to complete their course quickly, and learners make rapid progress. Staff encourage learners to manage their programmes independently and use a highly detailed tracking mechanism to ensure most learners and employers understand current progress and what needs to be done for learners to complete successfully.
- Trainers and assessors do not routinely integrate the development of mathematics into on- and off-the-job training. Trainers do not set targets to improve learners' understanding and application of mathematics skills into reviews, or stretch more able learners working towards potential management positions or entry to higher education.
- Learners' development and application of English skills are too slow to meet the needs of their course and employment. Trainers and assessors miss opportunities to correct mis-spelling and grammar in learners' written work, as well as missing opportunities to develop learners' good note-taking and report-writing skills.
- Advice and guidance are good. Staff work well with other organisations such as industry trade bodies and steering groups, schools and local universities to ensure potential learners are placed on the right programme. Staff provide good information, advice and guidance to employers and potential apprentices through the contacts they have with local employers in the West Midlands region and the commercial training courses that the company runs. The advice and guidance learners receive motivate them and open their eyes to future possibilities. The apprenticeship helps them to appraise their own situations and make well-informed career plans, for example for progression into supervisory roles or higher education.
- Staff promote equality and diversity well at induction by teaching learners how respect for people's individuality is crucial to good customer service. Staff are good role models for their industries and learners respond well by treating each other, staff and their customers with respect, therefore developing skills that are useful to them in employment. However, not all staff have sufficient confidence and understanding of how diversity can be promoted and celebrated within their own particular vocational areas, for example in working alongside or supervising a migrant workforce.

## Engineering

### Apprenticeships

Good

#### Teaching, learning and assessment in engineering are good because:

- a high proportion of learners successfully complete their apprenticeships, produce high standards of work and develop good vocational skills and knowledge
- assessors have high expectations and use their extensive work-related knowledge and experience well to motivate and support apprentices to develop high levels of confidence, achieve their qualifications, and contribute to the development of personal, learning and thinking skills
- assessors work closely with employers to develop well-planned 'tailored' training and assessment programmes in the workplace using specialist engineering and manufacturing processes and machine tools; learners develop high-level vocational skills and knowledge valued by employers
- learners' skills and understanding are assessed frequently in the workplace; positive and encouraging oral feedback, both in and between assessment and training sessions, enables apprentices to improve their skills

- progress reviews of vocational learning are thorough; they encourage the apprentice to take ownership through self-evaluation and employer support, preparing them well for their future careers, and are effective at identifying areas for improvement and in planning next steps
- assessors track and monitor progress systematically and effectively, ensuring apprentices remain on target to achieve their qualification on time
- apprentices, many of whom are in positions of responsibility in their company, receive good information, advice and guidance at induction and throughout the programme; as a result they are able to make informed choices about future career and progression opportunities
- the promotion of health and safety and safeguarding is good; as a result, apprentices have a clear understanding of their own responsibilities in the workplace and maintain high standards of safe working practices.

### **Teaching, learning and assessment in engineering are not yet outstanding because:**

- the majority of assessors do not provide sufficiently detailed written feedback on the quality of work; consequently, apprentices do not have a record of what they need to do to improve, reflect on in order to develop a deeper understanding of the topic
- the majority of assessors do not pay sufficient attention to the promotion and development of English and mathematics skills in training sessions and in progress reviews
- too many apprentices develop only a superficial understanding of equality and diversity; the majority of assessors do not routinely promote equality and diversity in training sessions or assessments, or take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to do so; most progress reviews make cursory reference to equality, with insufficient emphasis on raising awareness of diversity in the workplace.

## **Administration**

### **Apprenticeships**

Requires improvement

### **Teaching, learning and assessment in administration require improvement because:**

- assessors do not always make and record timely assessment decisions on apprentices' knowledge and performance and, as a result, a small minority of learners do not know the progress they are making; observation records are incomplete and do not identify the learning outcomes apprentices have met and learners' written knowledge statements are not promptly assessed
- assessors do not challenge more able learners to achieve higher-level units within their apprenticeship framework
- assessors do not identify learners' support needs in English, mathematics and ICT at the start of the programme to help learners improve their skills; learners complete initial assessments in only English and mathematics at the start of their programme, but do not complete diagnostic assessments to identify precisely the areas they need to improve; learners make frequent spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in their written work that go uncorrected
- written feedback requires improvement to help learners identify what they have done well and how they can improve
- learners have insufficient understanding of wider aspects of diversity to help them understand fully the needs of clients and colleagues.

### **In administration the provider has the following strengths:**

- learners develop good skills in the workplace and most current learners are making good progress towards the achievement of their apprenticeship framework, improving on the inadequate success rates for intermediate-level apprentices in 2013/2014

- learners develop good knowledge and understanding of business principles and legislation; through individual coaching by knowledgeable and experienced assessors, learners develop a good understanding of the importance of data storage and retrieval of documents to comply with data protection legislation and maintain business integrity
- the majority of learners are supported well by assessors and employers; frequent assessor visits, email contact and prompt assessment help learners make good progress at work and towards the achievement of their qualifications
- learners receive good initial information, advice and guidance before they start their apprenticeship; learners are supported well to prepare for interviews and successfully secure employment into jobs which meet their career aspirations.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

Good

- Leadership and management are good. Directors set a clear strategic vision and have ambitious, realistic plans to develop skills for apprentices' sustainable employment in the West Midlands and surrounding areas, contributing well to meeting local and regional needs. Senior leaders effectively communicate with staff about their role and contribution to the implementation of the strategic plans, and staff share the high expectations for learners.
- Employers speak very highly of In-Comm, which has a high profile across the locality and is well respected. Managers ensure that learning opportunities reflect the specific needs of individual employers. Communication with employers is excellent. Managers, trainers and assessors value highly the regular and detailed feedback they gather from learners and employers. This enables them to have confidence that current work and future plans align well with learners' and employers' needs.
- In-Comm's use of partnership working is excellent. Through its well-established connections with an extensive range of employers, organisations and agencies, managers are very well informed about local and regional priorities. Directors take a very active role in instigating and leading on the development of opportunities that provide learners with choice and progression to higher levels of study and employment.
- In-Comm takes the lead role in the Group Training Association, and is developing new programmes and progression opportunities in conjunction with a local university. In partnership with an employer, it is expanding its geographical reach by setting up new training opportunities in Shrewsbury to meet learning needs in that area. Directors have also invested significantly in new equipment in engineering, in new information and learning technology and in upgrading the accommodation at its main training centre, in order to support and enhance learning.
- Directors have significantly improved learners' access to on-line resources and learning opportunities, although their use is not yet extensive. Directors have also invested in an on-line tracking system, which greatly improves the monitoring and tracking of individual learners' progress. In the current year, most apprentices are making good progress in the planned timescales. The analysis and use of data to monitor and to improve standards are good, and managers and assessors are well informed about learners' progress.
- Performance management is systematic and detailed, with a strong emphasis on staff support and development. Procedures for tackling underperformance are appropriate and effective. However, the identification of staff needs in relation to their development of learners' skills in English and mathematics, and their ability to work confidently to develop learners' understanding of equality and diversity in the workplace are insufficient.
- In engineering, standards of teaching, learning and assessment continue to be good. Strategies to secure effective improvements for apprentices in administration are not sufficiently effective. Directors do not monitor this provision sufficiently well or take sufficiently effective actions to secure improvements. Observation feedback and action planning do not enable staff to be sufficiently clear how they can improve their work with learners.



- Self-assessment is an inclusive process and the report is mostly accurate. All staff contribute to self-assessment and the use of learners' and employers' views is good. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently clear or detailed in relation to the promotion of equality and diversity or in relation to safeguarding. Quality improvement planning, including the feedback staff receive from learning observations, does not clearly identify how all staff will work to secure necessary improvements and it currently does not drive improvements as effectively as it might.
- Senior leaders place a strong emphasis on mutual respect and collaborative working across In-Comm. This is clearly evident in the positive and harmonious culture which permeates all aspects of the organisation and the work with learners and employers. Learners are keen to learn and standards of behaviour are good. Arrangements to protect learners from bullying and harassment are effective. Actions to recruit more women into engineering do not have a sufficiently high profile and are not yet sufficiently effective. This is, however, incorporated into a newly developed and well-conceived marketing strategy.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good, and In-Comm meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. It carries out appropriate checks on staff, has designated leads for safeguarding, and clear policies and procedures. Learners feel safe in the training centre and in the workplace. All staff receive training on safeguarding. Attention to health and safety is good. In-Comm has plans in place to implement training for staff to raise awareness of radicalisation and extremism.

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

<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
Outcomes for learners	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>2</b>	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-

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



<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider								
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16-18, 19+								
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	200								
<b>Principal/CEO</b>	Mr. Geoff Jones – Managing Director								
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	October 2012								
<b>Website address</b>	www.in-comm.co.uk								
<b>Provider information at the time of the inspection</b>									
<b>Main course or learning programme level</b>	<b>Level 1 or below</b>		<b>Level 2</b>		<b>Level 3</b>		<b>Level 4 and above</b>		
<b>Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)</b>	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<b>Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>		<b>Advanced</b>		<b>Higher</b>				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	68	44	28	51	-	4			
<b>Number of traineeships</b>	16-19		19+		Total				
	-		-		-				
<b>Number of learners aged 14-16</b>									
<b>Full-time</b>	-								
<b>Part-time</b>	-								
<b>Number of community learners</b>	-								
<b>Number of employability learners</b>	-								
<b>Funding received from</b>	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
<b>At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>								

## Contextual information

In-Comm Training Services Ltd was established in 1982, although its roots can be traced back to 1953. The company's primary focus is to meet the training needs of small to medium-sized employers from the engineering industry and who are based in the West Midlands. Off-the-job training is currently provided from one training centre at Aldridge, Walsall. In-Comm offers apprenticeships at intermediate, advanced and the higher level across the subject areas of engineering and manufacturing, warehousing and storage, and business administration, management and customer service.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Gary Adkins

One lead inspector and four additional inspectors, assisted by the operations 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 individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant 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:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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