

IPS International Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

2–3, 15–17 March 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Require improvement
Outcomes for learners	Require improvement
Adult learning programmes	Require improvement
Apprenticeships	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Despite recent improvements, apprentices' achievements are not good enough and too many leave without completing all their qualifications.
- Learners do not develop their English and mathematical skills sufficiently. Most trainer assessors lack the confidence and expertise to help learners improve their punctuation, grammar, spelling and calculations.
- Trainer assessors do not set sufficiently challenging targets or learning activities to motivate the most-able learners.
- Learners do not receive enough detailed feedback from trainer assessors to help them improve their work and achieve their full potential.
- Managers do not use the findings from observing trainer assessors' training and assessment sessions well enough to ensure that all learners receive consistently good teaching, learning and assessment.

The provider has the following strengths

- A good proportion of the learners who complete their courses progress onto higher-level qualifications and many take on extra responsibilities at work or gain promotion.
- Learners develop good vocational, technical and personal skills, which they use productively at work.
- Trainer assessors provide highly relevant training which links learning very effectively to learners' job roles and training given by employers.
- The majority of vocational training is planned well and purposeful. Employers' and learners' needs are met very well through the flexible and tailored provision.
- The arrangements for safeguarding learners are managed well. Trainer assessors use their effective and recent training to good effect in ensuring that learners feel safe and know how to work safely.

Full report

Information about the provider

- IPS International Limited (IPS) offers apprenticeships and adult learning programmes to learners in a wide range of subjects; the main subjects are engineering, construction, manufacturing, health and social care, administration, customer service and management. The companies that employ learners are based mainly across the south and east of England, including London. Additionally, IPS has a very small traineeship provision, which was not inspected separately, but inspectors' judgements are included within this report.
- IPS has its head office and main training centre in Rochester, Kent, with a smaller training centre in Dover. The provision is much larger than at the previous inspection with a broader range of subjects on offer. Approximately one fifth of the provision is subcontracted to five subcontractors.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Maintain diligent monitoring of trainer assessors' and subcontractors' performance to ensure that success rates continue to rise, and take swift action should achievement rates dip.
- Develop trainer assessors' confidence, skills and knowledge in teaching English and mathematics so that they can help learners improve these skills more effectively.
- Raise all learners' aspirations by setting suitably demanding targets and learning activities. Give learners sufficiently detailed and developmental feedback to help them reach their full potential.
- Raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, where this is weaker, so that all learners receive a good-quality experience by:
 - taking a more consistent approach when observing trainer assessors' sessions
 - setting action plans for trainer assessors that have a clear direction for improvement
 - using the results of trainer assessors' observations better during development reviews and individual meetings with managers
 - collating the findings from observations of training and assessment so that these can be used to make more incisive judgements within self-assessment and quality-improvement plans
 - identifying where good practice exists and suitable ways to disseminate this to all trainer assessors.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

requires improvement

- IPS's arrangements for observing and improving the quality of training and assessment are underdeveloped. While most managers identify thoroughly what trainer assessors need to improve, a few do not. Trainer assessors do not have clear or coherent action plans for improving the quality of training and assessment.
- Senior managers have yet to collate and analyse their findings from observations, including those of subcontractors, to judge effectively the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This impedes senior managers' ability to prioritise what needs to improve and staff development activities.
- Staff development to increase trainer assessors' confidence and expertise in teaching English is ineffective. A few are qualified at a lower level than that at which their learners are studying functional skills, which restricts their ability to offer suitably challenging training or correct learners' mistakes accurately.
- Most managers use development reviews well to manage their team of trainer assessors. They tackle underperformance swiftly and effectively. In one programme area, a few trainer assessors have not had sufficiently recent development reviews to evaluate their performance.
- Managers and trainer assessors create a highly inclusive culture where they appreciate and meet learners' individual needs well. Managers analyse achievement by different groups and know why some groups achieve less well. They have taken effective action which has increased achievement by disabled learners or those with learning difficulties. Although trainer assessors promote diversity well in the main training centre, not all make this relevant to learners when visiting them to carry out training or progress reviews in the workplace.
- Managers and trainer assessors use data very effectively to track individual learners' progress and identify those who may be at risk of not achieving. They strengthened induction, recruitment and initial assessment successfully. Apprentices' success rates are starting to rise and fewer leave without achieving.
- Senior managers monitor subcontractors' achievement rates, training, assessment and safeguarding arrangements very thoroughly. They take decisive action when subcontractors cause concern. As a result of this, one subcontractor is not recruiting new learners and another has increased the number of information and communication technology (ICT) training sessions it holds for learners.
- Employers' and learners' needs are met particularly well through IPS's very flexible and tailored programmes. Partnership working is very good and managers, trainer assessors and employers work productively to provide coherent pathways for learners to progress. A few employers link their own staff development and promotion into IPS's training programmes, giving learners clear development and progression routes.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - Directors provide swift and effective guidance and support for senior managers. They resolve problems swiftly, such as by introducing additional middle managers to strengthen learners' tracking.
 - Directors set a very clear strategic direction for IPS which meets regional business needs and priorities well. Their strong partnerships have helped grow the provision and facilitate good progression routes.
 - Directors have not ensured that the quality of provision has remained good since the previous inspection. Although directors challenge progress routinely, they cannot easily measure impact across IPS without an overall quality improvement plan. They have only recently set success rate targets for this year.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
 - Managers have thorough and well-managed systems for safeguarding learners. They deal with incidents effectively and liaise well, where appropriate, with external specialist organisations.
 - Staff, including those with subcontractors, receive frequent training. They use this to good effect to raise learners' awareness of health, safety and how to manage levels of risk at work.
 - Managers are making reasonable progress in training staff about the risks of radicalisation and extremism but are at an early stage in introducing this to learners.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

requires improvement

- Trainer assessors do not extend the most-able learners' knowledge and skills sufficiently well. Learners do not always have targets that inspire them to achieve more quickly. During assessment, trainer assessors do not set stimulating enough activities to enthuse learners to work to their full potential.
- The quality of English and a few mathematics training sessions require improvement. Trainer assessors correct mistakes that learners make with spelling, grammar, language and calculations but do not give them sufficient strategies or learning activities to improve these skills.
- Not all trainer assessors promote equality and diversity well enough within training sessions and progress reviews. They do not discuss diversity within topical and workplace situations to make this meaningful to learners. However, learners attending the training centre and those subcontracted to Milestones demonstrate a better and, at times, good understanding of the principles of diversity.
- The effectiveness of training sessions varies too much and a minority are uninspiring. In a few theory-learning sessions, learners lose interest because learning activities lack variety. Occasionally, trainer assessors rush learning sessions, allowing learners little time to reflect on their learning before they are assessed. Learners in engineering working independently in the training centre's open study area lack sufficient direction and are easily distracted from their work.
- In the majority of training sessions, trainer assessors plan learning that enables learners to build on previously acquired learning and learn from their peers' experiences. Learners enjoy the small-group discussions and activities, which trainer assessors manage well to ensure that learning is at a quick pace. In one learning session in management, learners gained a useful insight into the relationship between vision, mission and objectives through comparing their own company's strategies and policies with those of their peers.
- Trainer assessors make good links between training and learners' workplace activities. They use learners' experiences from work well to explain concepts and theories in a meaningful way. Learners enjoy these purposeful activities and learn quickly how to carry out specific work-related tasks. Learners in fenestration, and their workplace mentors, complete well-devised booklets which capture fully the standard and extent of the skills that learners gain and demonstrate on site; these are then used well during assessment.
- The majority of employers support learners particularly well by ensuring that they have sufficient time to attend training sessions and carry out independent study. Many take an active role in identifying suitable projects for learners to complete that are relevant to work and their personal development. A group of learners of business improvement techniques have become 'efficiency champions', giving them responsibility for contributing towards the company's business objectives.
- Managers, trainer assessors and employers plan training and assessment carefully to take place at times that suit the learners' and employers' business needs. Learners in engineering and their employers can choose from a variety of well-planned training in the workplace, or at the training centre, through day-release, six-week blocks or one-year, full-time study. In response to an employer's request, a group of learners receive a broad overview of identified engineering topics at the training centre, which their employer enhances with specialist training when they return to work.
- Learners receive good and very flexible support from trainer assessors, with many benefiting from extra help by telephone or email between training and assessment sessions. Trainer assessors support disabled learners or those with learning difficulties well. This has contributed towards increasing their achievement rate.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

- The majority of learners do not develop their English, language and mathematical skills and knowledge sufficiently well. Not all learners appreciate the importance of these skills for sustaining employment and their career progression. As a result, they lack the motivation to improve mistakes they make with spelling, grammar, punctuation or calculations.
- Learners have too little awareness of the dangers of extremism and radicalisation. Trainer assessors do not always discuss topical events that are relevant to learners' chosen subjects, work environment or geographical location. Although most learners understand how social justice and equality apply to them and their personal situation, not all have a balanced or broad awareness of life in modern Britain.
- Learners know how to keep safe and healthy. They have a good understanding of health and safety, which they apply at work and helps keep them, their colleagues and clients safe. Trainer assessors routinely discuss topics such as bullying and harassment with learners, who have a good understanding of how to report these.

- Learners develop good vocational and technical skills and knowledge. This helps them to improve their effectiveness, become active team members and make valuable contributions at work. Through completing their apprenticeship, learners of team leading chair meetings and delegate work more effectively.
- Learners become more confident and adopt professional behaviours towards their colleagues and employers. They behave well and show respect for fellow learners. The majority of learners attend well.
- Learners receive useful careers advice. Most appreciate how the qualification they are studying fits into their long-term career goals or helps them increase their potential at work. IPS offers learners a broad range of progression routes to higher-level or complementary in-house courses, through its subcontractors or with partner universities.

Outcomes for learners

require improvement

- Although apprentices' achievement rates have improved in recent years, they are not yet good. Too many learners leave without achieving all parts of the apprenticeship. In particular, their achievement of English, mathematics and ICT functional skills qualifications requires improvement.
- Intermediate- and higher-level apprentices and learners subcontracted to Soloman Executive have lower achievement rates. Managers are aware of the underlying reasons and have taken action, but it is too early to judge if this has improved success by these groups of learners. They have improved individual support successfully for disabled apprentices or those with learning difficulties, who now achieve at a similar rate to their peers.
- A significant minority of current health and social care learners on adult learning programmes make slow progress. This is largely due to staffing shortages and delays in assessing their work. The programme area now has sufficient staff and there are early signs that learners' progress is improving.
- Learners' achievement of short qualifications on the adult learning programme is consistently good. Learners use these qualifications to good effect at work to become specialists in areas such as dementia, diabetes and end-of-life care.
- The majority of apprentices make at least the progress expected of them towards achieving vocational qualifications and skills, and some make good progress. Generally their work meets the required standard, with the vast majority demonstrating very good workplace skills.
- A good proportion of learners progress onto advanced- and higher-level qualifications. Many learners start on short adult learning programmes, which prepare them well to advance onto apprenticeships, often in management or team leading. Most of the small number of learners who have completed the traineeship, which is subcontracted to That Nail Place and Milestones, have progressed onto an apprenticeship or into further education.
- Many learners gain promotion at work. They often take on additional responsibilities for supervising new staff or leading teams. Additionally, learners, such as those who have completed early years qualifications, became self-employed and now run successful businesses.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

require improvement

- IPS has 223 learners on adult learning programmes; the majority are taking short courses in health and social care. The remaining learners are studying construction, manufacturing, hairdressing, beauty therapy or early years education. Approximately one tenth of learners on adult learning programmes are on programmes subcontracted to Milestones, That Nail Place or Soloman Executive.
- Too many current health and social care learners make slow progress towards completing their qualifications. Their rate of progress has been delayed by infrequent assessment visits or delays experienced while waiting for trainer assessors to mark their work.
- Learners' development of English and language skills requires improvement. Not all trainer assessors have sufficient skills, knowledge or confidence to teach this subject or give learners strategies that will improve skills. A few trainer assessors do not correct learners' spelling and grammatical errors, and, at times, their written feedback to learners is poorly written with mistakes.

- Trainer assessors do not give learners sufficiently detailed feedback or actions following assessment to help them improve the standard of their work. Most trainer assessors do not use fully the results of learners' initial assessment to set developmental targets, including for English.
- Trainer assessors provide learners with good-quality individual coaching. They question learners' knowledge and experiences skilfully and make learning very relevant to the workplace. Learners develop good levels of confidence in their own ability, technical skills and vocational knowledge, and put these to good use: for example, by taking on responsibility in their role as teaching assistants for groups of pupils, such as those with English as an additional language or a disability.
- Learners receive effective pastoral support. They welcome the readily available help given by trainer assessors by email and telephone, which aids their progress between the planned coaching and assessment sessions. In particular, learners who have previously been unsuccessful in education value this.
- At the end of their courses, learners' achievement of qualifications is consistently good. They develop good workplace skills which make them more effective at work. Learners increase their level of expertise and contribute, often significantly, towards the businesses that employ them. Learners in a care home take courses in diabetes, dementia and end-of-life care to help them improve the care they give to the growing number of residents with these conditions.
- Many learners take on additional responsibilities, for example by developing materials for parents of pre-school children to give them ideas they can use when playing with their children; many also gain promotion. They become more confident through studying and are keen to progress.

Apprenticeships

require improvement

- IPS has 702 apprentices across a large number of subjects. The majority of learners are taking apprenticeships in health and social care, engineering, manufacturing, construction, administration, accounting, management or customer service. Approximately one fifth of learners are on apprenticeships subcontracted to Milestones, That Nail Place, RM Training, Sittingbourne Community College or Soloman Executive.
- Learners' achievement of qualifications requires improvement. A significant minority of learners leave without completing their English and mathematics qualifications successfully. Trainer assessors correct learners' mistakes in spelling, punctuation, grammar and calculation but do not give them enough tuition or strategies to develop these skills.
- Trainer assessors do not use consistently well the broad range of information they gather at the start of the learners' apprenticeship to set detailed enough targets. Many trainer assessors set targets for learners that focus purely on the vocational tasks they need to complete by the next assessment visit rather than their wider development needs, including English and mathematical skills. Learners do not receive sufficient feedback to help them reach their full potential or make more rapid progress.
- The quality of training sessions varies in its effectiveness. In a few training sessions, learners become bored by the lack of variety in learning activities, which impedes their learning. Trainer assessors do not motivate and challenge the most-able learners by setting sufficiently difficult or stimulating learning and assessment activities.
- The majority of learners attend purposeful training sessions that link well with the workplace. Learners enjoy taking part in small-group activities where they benefit from sharing experiences and learning. These help learners in engineering to enhance their supervisory skills and those on business courses to develop computer programmes that are useful to their employer.
- Most employers plan and hold good-quality training at work which enables learners to acquire technical and practical skills quickly. They ensure that learners have sufficient study time at work and time off to attend training sessions. They set learners interesting projects; one manager asked learners to lead a project group to investigate how to upgrade a food packaging machine for new lines and then trial this. The learners gained a better understanding of how to apply their technical knowledge within a working factory and those on higher-level apprenticeships gained experience in chairing meetings, presenting information, and managing change and teams.
- Learners' and employers' needs are met particularly well through the very flexible modes of delivery. Trainer assessors adapt the frequency of training sessions to meet employers' business needs alongside learners' shift patterns and personal commitments. Learners in engineering can choose from a wide variety of topics and training durations offered in the training centre, ranging from day-release to one-year full-time courses.
- Learners develop good vocational skills and knowledge. They become more confident and effective at work, with many gaining promotion. Most learners produce work of a good standard.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,993
CEO	Don MacDonald
Website address	www.IPS-international.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	0	0	0	201	0	22	0	0
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	137	249	102	188	0	26		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	1		0		1			
Number of learners aged 14-16	0							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Soloman Executive Limited ■ Milestones Training Limited ■ That Nail Place Limited ■ Sittingbourne Community College ■ RM Training (UK) Limited 							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Janet Rodgers, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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William Baidoe-Ansah	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Smith	Ofsted Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Elliott	Ofsted Inspector
Patricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector

The inspection converted to a full inspection from a short inspection. The above team was assisted by a director of IPS International Limited, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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