

IPS International Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

14–17 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Leaders and managers have established a strong culture of working with their staff, employers and subcontractors to bring about improvement.
- Leaders and managers maintain very good partnerships with employers, resulting in programmes that reflect employers' and learners' needs well.
- Arrangements for observing, monitoring and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are very effective.
- Learners and apprentices develop very good vocational, technical and personal skills that they use productively at work to the benefit of themselves and their employers.
- IPS manages subcontractors particularly well, monitoring their performance and supporting staff to improve their teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- Learners' and apprentices' achievements have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. The vast majority complete within planned timescales.
- Achievements of English and mathematics qualifications at levels 1 and 2 have improved and are now good.
- Trainer assessors do not identify clear targets for improvement for a small minority of learners and apprentices.
- Trainer assessors do not always make sure that learners and apprentices have opportunities in the workplace to improve their English and mathematics skills.

Full report

Information about the provider

- IPS International Limited (IPS) offers apprenticeships and adult learning programmes to learners in a range of subjects including engineering, manufacturing, motor vehicle, health and social care, business administration, customer service, accounts, information and digital technology, and management.
- The companies that employ learners are based in the south and east of England, including London. IPS leaders have reduced subcontracted provision to a fifth of the total, across four subcontractors. IPS makes use of loans funding for a small number of eligible learners and has a subcontractor with a small traineeship provision.
- IPS has its main office and training centre in Rochester, Kent, with a smaller training centre in Dover. It delivers commercial workplace training across the wider south-east area.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Maintain thorough monitoring of trainer assessors' and subcontractors' performance to make sure that achievement rates continue to rise in all subject areas.
- Use learners' and apprentices' reviews more effectively to check learning and set meaningful and realistic targets so that they know what to do to improve their work skills.
- Support learners and apprentices better to develop their English and mathematics skills and improve their career prospects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Since the previous inspection, the two IPS directors have successfully led improvements to the provision. They have worked well together with managers, trainer assessors and subcontractors to improve outcomes for learners and teaching, learning and assessment. Courses are well managed.
- Directors and managers understood the weaknesses identified at the previous inspection and responded positively by setting a clear priority to improve the quality of provision and outcomes. They worked effectively with all staff to plan and carry out comprehensive actions for improvement.
- Directors and managers have significantly enhanced their capacity to make sustained improvement through better management and more effective quality assurance. They have a thorough understanding of what they need to do to bring about improvement and of the impact of their actions to improve. Curriculum managers and their trainer assessors share this focus on quality improvement. It is evident, for example, in the excellent quality assurance for IPS's partner subcontractors.
- Directors, senior and middle managers monitor learners' progress and programme quality very thoroughly. The scheme for observing teaching, learning and assessment very effectively identifies strengths, areas for improvement and training priorities, and includes all trainer assessors and subcontractors. Directors make good use of the results of observations as part of their performance management of managers and trainer assessors.
- Directors continue to work to improve the quality of the IPS self-evaluation reports. These contain much useful information and analysis. However, at times the content is insufficiently evaluative and reports do not sufficiently summarise overall strengths and areas for improvement. This prevents swift analysis and improvement action planning.
- Directors make sure that close and highly effective joint working with employers remains at the centre of their work. Employers' and learners' needs are met particularly well through flexible programmes well-matched to needs. Directors and managers oversee the work of subcontractors effectively. Highly effective partnerships with subcontractors and employers meet the best interests of learners. Learners benefit from carefully planned and executed programmes, significantly influenced by the needs of their employers and of their industries.
- The strategic priority to develop learners' English and mathematics skills is improving teaching and learning, and outcomes. However, managers recognise that they need to do more work to develop these skills for all learners.
- Managers, trainer assessors and employers work well to promote an ethos of equality and an environment where individuals respect others' beliefs, attitudes and values. They are increasingly developing learners' understanding of British values.

The governance of the provider

- Directors continue to set a very clear and positive direction for IPS, meeting local, regional and national training, and employment needs and priorities very well. They have successfully led the further development of their courses to meet the specific needs of particular employers.
- Directors are visible in the management and day-to-day work of IPS. They take the lead in promoting further development and use their own significant skills and experience well to help secure improvement.
- Directors have made sure that the quality of provision and outcomes have improved since the previous inspection. They measure performance well against their own challenging targets.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Directors and managers put in place thorough and particularly well-managed systems for safeguarding learners. Learners are confident to raise any concerns they may have.
- Directors make sure that safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and fully cover the significant number of learners in subcontracted provision. With managers, they have kept pace with developments in safeguarding practice since the previous inspection.
- Staff, including those with subcontractors, receive frequent training. Currently, they are all studying for a level 2 accredited safeguarding and 'Prevent' duty qualification. Comprehensive safer recruitment checks for staff are up to date and thoroughly recorded. Directors and managers maintain very productive links with expert agencies to help take the most appropriate action to deal with safeguarding concerns.
- Directors and managers have made good progress with the implementation of the 'Prevent' duty since the previous inspection. Staff and learners are well aware of the threats of radicalisation and extremism, their identification and how to report them.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved since the previous inspection. Trainer assessors plan and execute sessions well. The vast majority of sessions are stimulating and inspiring, and motivate learners and apprentices extremely well. Learners enjoy learning and appreciate the opportunities they have to develop their skills and gain well-recognised qualifications because of well-designed activities in the centre and workplace. They make good contributions to their employers' businesses.
- Trainer assessors give learners and apprentices good oral and written feedback on assignments. The feedback helps learners to understand what they need to do to improve and they work hard to do so.
- Staff provide good support for the development of English and mathematics skills. In health and social care and business administration sessions, learners benefit from individual support to improve their mathematics and/or English skills before taking

functional skills examinations. As a result, achievements in these examinations have improved.

- Trainer assessors correct spelling and grammar mistakes in learners' written work, helping learners to improve their use of English and technical terminology in the workplace. Trainer assessors provide learners with a good range of homework exercises that help them improve their spelling, grammar and self-confidence.
- Engineering apprentices benefit from well-designed, motivational, assessment activities that develop their skills. For example, first-year apprentices produced a small metal induction block that covers a broad range of drilling and cutting techniques. They spoke confidently about how this will help them with future assignments and were proud to demonstrate their new skills.
- The majority of learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity and know how these relate to the diverse needs of their clients and customers. Health and social care learners are well informed about the need for professional boundaries and show very good respect for others.
- Staff are very well qualified. They use their experience and professional relationships with employers to good effect to develop safe, productive learning environments for apprentices. For example, learning sessions in care homes take place in appropriate learning spaces away from the residents. This gives learners the time to concentrate, reflect on their learning and learn from each other's experiences.
- Most learners and apprentices adopt safe working practices and know how to keep themselves safe. Apprentices working in particularly hazardous environments, for example in the liquid gas industry, have a good understanding of the accident risks in their industry.
- Staff identify learners' additional learning needs quickly. They provide good support so that these learners can make progress in line with their peers. Trainer assessors share information from the assessment of learners' starting points with colleagues and employers to plan learners' skills development in the workplace.
- Although teaching, learning and assessment have improved since the previous inspection, in a minority of cases trainer assessors do not use questioning well enough to check understanding and encourage learners to deepen their learning.
- In a minority of instances, trainer assessors do not set useful targets that help learners and apprentices to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Learners and apprentices are well-behaved, confident, respectful and courteous. They demonstrate good attitudes to their study and produce a high standard of work. As a result, they make good progress.
- Learners and apprentices receive effective support and impartial careers guidance that help them make well-informed decisions about their next steps. As a result of this, many learners and apprentices are promoted and given higher levels of responsibility.

- Attendance and punctuality are very good. Apprentices appreciate the importance of both as work skills. Managers closely monitor attendance and punctuality. They deal promptly with any persistent lateness or absenteeism.
- Learners and apprentices develop a good understanding of British values through 'topic of the month' discussions, and put them into practice in the workplace and in taught sessions.
- Learners feel safe. Trainer assessors reinforce the need to maintain personal safety particularly well through induction and during training. Learners are clear about the potential risks when using social media and the internet, and what to be wary of in relation to dangers from extremist groups. They have a good practical understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism.
- Most learners and apprentices improve their skills in English and mathematics in the workshops and learning sessions. For example, engineering apprentices use technical language well when talking to their peers. They also apply complex calculation formulae effectively. However, trainer assessors do not provide enough guidance to a minority of apprentices on how to practise and develop their English and mathematics skills in the workplace.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Following the previous inspection where achievements for apprentices were not good enough, managers took decisive action, which has led to good achievements for the large majority of apprentices.
- Apprentices' achievement of technical certificates has improved significantly and is very high. Managers have also made sure that learners on short courses continue to achieve well.
- Senior managers have a strong focus on improving apprentices' and learners' English, mathematics and information technology skills. Achievements in English and mathematics at levels 1 and 2 are very good, and above rates for similar providers nationally. The vast majority of apprentices and learners pass their English and mathematics qualifications at the first attempt.
- The vast majority of current apprentices and learners are making good progress in developing the skills and knowledge required in the workplace. The standard of apprentices' work is particularly impressive. For example, an apprentice has sole responsibility for manufacturing high-performance camshafts for prestige car manufacturers.
- Apprentices' portfolios contain an extensive range of good-quality evidence. A good proportion of apprentices progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships, and a small number go on to higher apprenticeships.
- Most learners on health and social care courses gain promotion with their employers and a few progress to owning their own care home. Many former apprentices and learners are employed as trainer assessors by IPS. A very high proportion of apprentices and learners remain in full employment after completing their courses.

- There are no discernible differences between the achievements of different groups of apprentices and learners.

Types of provision

Adult learning programmes

Good

- Managers have made sure that adult learning courses align closely to the needs of employers and practitioners in the care sector. IPS managers provide a wide range of short vocational courses for learners, such as working with individuals with learning difficulties, administering medication, mental health care, end of life care and diploma courses. These all support learners' current job roles and career aspirations very well.
- Trainer assessors use their knowledge, skills and highly effective relationships with employers to provide flexible learning activities in learners' workplaces. As a result, learners make good progress with assignments and workbooks and with their qualifications.
- Trainer assessors use effective questioning to help learners reflect and extend their answers during professional discussions. Trainer assessors help learners apply their workplace practices to the theories they are learning. For example, a learner has reviewed the call buzzer system within her workplace, following completion of a unit on cross infection.
- Staff provide learners on short courses with detailed feedback which helps them to understand why their work is correct or what they need to do to improve. Trainer assessors provide helpful information for further research or practical activities that learners can try in their workplace. However, learners on diploma courses do not receive sufficient useful and specific feedback on their work to help them improve.
- Learners develop their English skills well. Trainer assessors correct spelling and grammar mistakes in learners' written work and provide focused homework exercises to help them practise specific skills. Learners who take functional skills English and mathematics examinations do well and the large majority pass their qualifications.
- Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity matters and relate these to the range of clients with whom they work. Learners adopt safe working practices and are aware of how to keep themselves safe.

Apprenticeships

Good

- Apprentices' achievements have improved significantly since the previous inspection. Trainer assessors work very closely with employers to plan learning in the workplace that matches apprentices' aspirations and employers' business needs well. Employers often provide apprentices with additional learning opportunities in their industry, and involve them in interesting projects in which they take on more responsibility.

- Apprentices benefit from the extensive industry experience and expertise that trainer assessors and coaches apply in their purposeful training. As a result, apprentices develop a wide range of vocational skills and knowledge. The large majority complete their work on time and produce good standards of work.
- Trainer assessors act as positive role models and have high expectations for their apprentices. As a result, apprentices make good progress. Many go onto higher-level programmes and gain promotion.
- Apprentices develop good personal and learning skills. The large majority of apprentices participate well in group sessions and enjoy sharing experiences and learning. Apprentices attend punctually, make good use of their time and work well independently. They become more reflective and engage well in self-assessment of their work and progress.
- Trainer assessors develop apprentices' English and mathematics skills well on the large majority of programmes. Apprentices are very confident in their use of technical language, correct errors independently and enjoy working out calculations during practical sessions. For example, apprentices are able to explain electronic components and their uses clearly and with confidence. A motor vehicle apprentice enjoyed working out lengths, degrees and angles when lapping a valve into a three-cylinder head.
- Trainer assessors adapt their teaching styles well to match the various needs of apprentices. They make extensive and good use of websites and interactive learning technologies to reinforce learning.
- Managers and trainer assessors track and record apprentices' progress very effectively across programmes, and ensure that apprentices at risk of falling behind are quickly identified and supported to achieve.
- Trainer assessors provide apprentices with clear and thorough written feedback on their work that helps them to improve their skills and use of English. Trainer assessors support apprentices well to build confidence before taking examinations.
- IPS staff provide good and useful advice and guidance which help apprentices to make rapid progression from level 2 to level 3, and to make informed decisions about their next steps in learning and employment. For example, on motor vehicle and manufacturing courses, a substantial number of apprentices gain promotion at work into managerial roles and act as coaches for new apprentices.
- Trainer assessors review progress frequently but comments in the review are often too brief and do not always target the skills that apprentices need to practise and develop. Target setting is too often qualification-based and does not always provide sufficient detail on how apprentices can improve their workplace and technical skills. Trainer assessors do not provide enough guidance on how a minority of apprentices could practise and develop their English and mathematics skills in the workplace.

Provider details

Unique reference number	52533
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18, 19+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	1,585
Principal/CEO	Don MacDonald
Telephone number	01634 298 805
Website	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 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	0	0	31	157	24	39	0	13
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	72	97	83	149	0	22		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	8		0		8			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16								
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding								
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Fit for Trade Limited Milestones Training Limited Rose Rail Training (UK) Limited That Nail and Beauty							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by one of the directors, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, 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.

Inspection team

Bob Cowdrey, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Kate Hill	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tricia Collis	Ofsted Inspector
David Martin	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ruth Harrison	Her Majesty's Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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