

In-Comm Training and Business Services Ltd

Inspection date

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Inspection number

300705

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies.
- Business administration and law.

Description of the provider

1. In-Comm Training Services Limited (In-Comm), based in Aldridge in the West Midlands, was established in 1982 as a private limited company. Two shareholders, both of whom are its managing directors, own the company. In April 2001, the company was re-structured to form In-Comm Training Services Ltd and In-Comm Business Services Limited. In-Comm Business Services is involved in commercial training and Train to Gain programmes. In-Comm Training Services is responsible for training young people on work-based learning programmes. Both companies work from the same premises and operate with the same quality systems and staff. The senior management team of both companies comprises two managing directors and a training services manager. There are a further 25 staff.
2. In-Comm Training Services, funded solely by The Black Country Local Learning and Skills Council, provides training for 103 workbased learners. The company offers apprenticeship and advanced apprenticeship programmes in engineering and manufacturing technologies, business administration and law, and information and communication technology. Delivery of training up to Level 2 takes place at its own training centre. All other training and assessment is at employers premises.
3. In-Comm Business Services forms part of the Black Country Services and Technology Consortium involved in Train to Gain programmes, Train to Gain programmes in engineering and manufacturing technologies, warehouse and distribution, business administration, leadership and management, information and communication technology, and customer service provide for 184 adult learners. Also offered are additional qualifications in health and safety, quality, human resource development and management programmes.
4. In-Comm works in partnership with three Group Training Associations (GTA), Birmingham GTA, Group Manufacturers Association, and West Midlands GTA. Two of the GTA chairpersons are non-executive directors of In-Comm. At the time of the inspection the numbers of work based learners in information and communication technology were too few for this provision to be inspected and graded separately.
5. In-Comm recruits most of its learners from the Aldridge wards in Walsall. These wards have a minority ethnic population of 3%, compared with 13.4% for Walsall. The proportion of school leavers in Walsall with five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSE) at grade C or above is 40.6%, compared with 47.9% nationally.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	good: Grade 2
Achievement and standards	good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	good: Grade 2
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	good: Grade 2
Business administration and law	good: Grade 2

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of the provision and leadership and management are all good. Provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies, and business administration and law and Train to Gain provision is good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

7. In-Comm has demonstrated good capacity to improve. It has made good progress in improving the provision since the previous inspection. Most of the identified weaknesses have been successfully resolved. Training in engineering has improved from satisfactory to good. Success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices are improving. Actions to improve quality are well-planned and clearly focused on improving the learners' experience.
8. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. Staff at all levels contribute to the process through a range of teams providing information to In-Comm's commitment to excellence team; the report writing group. The self-assessment report also takes in the views of employers and learners. The content is good although some of the strengths were descriptive rather than qualitative. Inspectors gave the same grade for all aspects of the provision, with the exception of leadership and management judged by inspectors to be good. The self-assessment report graded this area as satisfactory.

Key strengths

- Good and improving success rates.
- Good quality work placements.
- Good working relationships with employers.
- Good leadership and clear strategic direction.
- Particularly effective actions to improve the quality of the provision.
- Well managed health and safety arrangements.

Key areas for improvement

- Low timely success rate of learners.
- The insufficient involvement of employers in progress reviews.
- Insufficient individual coaching for business administration and customer service Train to Gain learners.

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

9. Learners clearly demonstrate good practical and vocational skills. Their standard of work is high. Engineering learners quickly become competent in basic engineering skills and develop a high level of vocational skills during training at employers' premises. Business learners are articulate and confident and some gain promotion while on programme.
10. Success rates are good and improving. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are high and they make good progress toward achievement. Employers provide good quality training and learning experiences at their premises. Learners' standard of work is high and they enjoy their learning. Success rates for both engineering and business apprentices achieving their NVQ and framework qualifications have risen significantly. However, timely achievement rates are low but improving. Learners achieve a wide range of additional qualifications. The courses and additional qualifications are relevant to the industries in which they work and some learners work towards higher level qualifications.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

11. Employers provide good quality training and learning experiences. Work-placements, carefully matched to the learners' and employers' requirements, effectively help them to develop a wide range of relevant skills and knowledge. Assessment practices are good. For business learners, well structured and focused assessment planning meetings prepare learners well for the wide range of assessment methods used by experienced and competent assessors. Literacy and numeracy support is satisfactory. If identified during initial assessment learners receive support from appropriately trained assessors during their regular visits to the workplace. For some Train to Gain learners little coaching is taking place in the workplace. They do not receive learning materials or guidance in understanding the background knowledge of their training programme.
12. Engineering learners benefit from good progression opportunities. In-Comm is developing a strong school programme during which pupils attend the training centre to work towards a technical certificate. Pupils have progressed from this programme to apprentice and advanced apprentice programmes. Train to Gain learners are also encouraged to progress on to a Level 3 programme. Learners work towards a range of additional qualifications that are clearly relevant to their vocational programmes.
13. In-Comm's staff and employers give all learners effective personal and training support. Learners clearly benefit from the frequent and flexible arrangements of assessor visits and the mentored support they receive in identifying evidence and guidance in completing their portfolio work. Learners receive good support from employers and benefit from extra responsibilities, time off to work on their qualifications and promotion within the company. Although all employers are highly supportive of the training programmes they are not sufficiently involved in planning and reviewing learners' training during the regular progress reviews.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: satisfactory: grade 3

14. Leadership and strategic planning within In-Comm are good. Strategic planning is consultative with all members of staff contributing. Directors hold effective full-day meetings with staff to enable a full discussion of the longer term business objectives. The resulting business plan gives a clear strategic direction to the company. Directors show good leadership. Staff value the supportive, open and approachable style of management within the company.
15. In-Comm has developed good and effective partnership arrangements with other organisations. It has excellent working relationships with a number of schools, offering programmes in engineering. For example, a programme for young people who are disaffected and at risk of exclusion from school is effective in improving both behaviour and attendance. In-Comm's membership of the Train to Gain consortium provides additional opportunities for the company to work with other training providers and share good practice.
16. Quality improvement arrangements are particularly effective in improving the quality of the provision. For example, through its quality assurance processes In-Comm identified that the quality of the provision provided by some of its subcontractors was unsatisfactory and decided to deliver this provision itself. The self-assessment process is effective. All staff have been consulted and most recognise the findings. The self-assessment report broadly reflects the findings of the inspection team in most areas. However, the associated quality improvement plan contains some unclear actions. For example, it has no clear action to achieve the stated objective of increasing achievement in one area.
17. In-Comm has an appropriate range of regularly audited procedures to check that all learners have a good training experience. A thorough risk assessment is made of each procedure with high risk areas receiving more frequent auditing. The quality manager has developed a very effective method of risk banding, in particular, of those procedures which have a direct impact on learners. Learners benefit from the well managed health and safety arrangements. Their welfare and safety at In-Comm's training centre and employers premises is clearly a high priority. Employers are thoroughly risk assessed for their health and safety practices and those at high risk receive regular and detailed audits. Assessors, on their visits to employers, clearly focus on health and safety arrangements and provide regular reports to In-Comm's training services manager. Reported accidents are thoroughly analysed and actions implemented to reduce the risk of further incidents of a similar nature.
18. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. In-Comm has an appropriate range of policies covering equality of opportunity, harassment, bullying and other areas relating to learners' well-being. Thorough checks are made of the appropriateness of employers' equal opportunities arrangements to ensure that learners are not at risk during training activities.

19. Learners receive an equality and diversity handbook during induction, although this places too much emphasis on legislation. Some training in equality of opportunity takes place during induction but this does not always sufficiently promote the broader aspects of equality of opportunity. Promotion of equality of opportunity during progress reviews is satisfactory on engineering programmes. However, learners on the business and management programmes benefit from particularly good promotion of equal opportunities and demonstrate good understanding. In-Comm effectively analyses the ethnic profile of its learners and is aware of the under representation of some groups such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds or young women. The company has taken some actions to address this but these have not been successful in increasing the numbers in these groups.

What learners like

- Gaining a qualification - 'I'm 37 and I've finally got a qualification', 'It will be good for my curriculum vitae', 'The qualification will help me in finding a new job and also increase my wages'.
- Friendly, knowledgeable and supportive staff - 'The trainer certainly knew his stuff', 'The assessor would give me help to understand the technical terms, and the meaning of certain English words'.
- Broadening understanding - 'enables me to find out how others work', 'I see colleagues in a different light now', 'Completing the qualification has helped me to be more aware of the production process', 'I didn't know about the accident book before doing the qualification! But I do now'.
- Supportive employers - 'my employer has been helpful and supportive during the assessment period'.
- Raised aspirations - 'I want to do more', 'really chuffed to have done it', 'I enjoyed the learning experience and look forward to level 3'.

What learners think could improve

- More time allocated to the programme - 'I need more time to complete my portfolio work'.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Good: Grade 2

Context

20. There are 81 employed learners on work-based learning programmes in engineering. Thirty two are working towards the advanced modern apprenticeship programme and 49 are apprentices. There are also 98 learners on Train to Gain programmes. Training for the apprenticeship programmes takes place at In-Comms' training centre and at employers' premises. Advanced apprentices attend local colleges for the background knowledge aspect of the modern apprenticeship framework. There are ten assessors, three of whom are also Internal Verifiers. In-Comm's assessors provide training for the background knowledge aspect to apprentices at the training centre. Company assessors visit learners in the workplace at least every four weeks to carry out assessment of learners' skills and formally review learners' progress every 12 weeks.

Strengths

- Good and improving apprentice framework success rates.
- High Train to Gain success rates.
- Good success rates of additional qualifications.
- Good development of practical skills.
- Good quality training.
- Good learner progression.
- Good learner support.

Areas for improvement

- Low timely framework success rate on apprenticeship programmes.
- Insufficient employer involvement in progress reviews.

Achievement and standards

21. Achievement and standards are good. Apprentice framework success rates are good and improving. Over a three year period the success rate has improved to 76% for the year 2005/06. Success rates for advanced apprenticeships also improved to 73% for the year 2004/05, but fell to 52% in 2005/06. Key skills and technical certificate achievements are good. However, for current year learners on apprenticeship programmes approximately 25% are making slow progress towards completion of their framework.
22. Success rates on Train to Gain programmes are high. During the current year of the 129 learners who started on the programme, 85% were successful in completing the programme with 83% completing within their planned end date.
23. The success rate for additional qualifications is good. All learners achieve additional qualifications. They are relevant to the industries in which the learners work and include health and safety, manual handling, abrasive wheel regulations, crane safety and

environmental health. Some learners are working towards higher national qualifications, which are additional to the requirements of the apprentice framework.

24. Learners' development of practical skills is good and clearly relevant to their employment. While at In-Comm's training centre, learners quickly become competent in basic engineering operations. During their training with employers they become part of the engineering team and continue to extend and develop their skills. Some apprentices operate modern machinery manufacturing products demanding a high level of engineering skills and extremely high degrees of accuracy.
25. Learners' portfolio work is satisfactory. Most portfolios include well presented, diverse evidence and make good use of photographic evidence. Learners are aware of the progress they are making on their programmes and have a good understanding of the apprenticeship framework requirements.

Quality of provision

26. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Employers provide good quality training and learning experience. Work placements, carefully matched to the learners' and employer's requirements, support learners effectively and help them to gain a wide range of relevant experience. In many of the companies, carefully planned training provides learners with experience in different aspects of the employer's business. The employers provide good opportunities and sufficient time for the learners to collect appropriate evidence. However, employers are not always involved during the three-monthly formal reviews.
27. Learners have good health and safety awareness. Structured and interactive health and safety sessions take place during the induction process. Learners receive further reinforcement of engineering health and safety practices on a nationally recognised health and safety course. Learners discuss good health and safety working practices with assessors at each progress review, and it is clearly promoted throughout their training. Resources at In-Comm's training centre are satisfactory. Learners use a good range of tools and equipment which meet current industrial standards. The provider has sufficient qualified assessors, tutors and internal verifiers. Assessors are competent and experienced. Background knowledge teaching is satisfactory. Resources at employers are very good, and learners clearly benefit from training opportunities available to them. Many learners are developing their skills using highly sophisticated machinery.
28. At the start of their training programme, learners complete an initial assessment of their individual literacy and numeracy skills. The results, recorded in the individual learning plan, identify any additional support needs and learners receive help through their assessors.
29. The way in which learners' needs and interests are met is good. All learners have good progression opportunities. A strong schools programme enables learners to attend the centre for one day each week to work towards the completion of a technical certificate. Approximately ten per cent of pupils progress onto apprentice or advanced apprentice programmes. Train to Gain learners are also encouraged to progress, and many learners have completed a NVQ Level 3 programme. Many learners progress into technical and supervisory roles and within their companies.

30. Learners receive good support. Assessors visit learners, usually monthly or more frequently, to carry out assessments, provide feedback, review progress, and plan their next visit. At each visit, assessors review the health and safety arrangements relevant to the learner's welfare. Targets and actions are set for the next visit. Assessors often act as mentors, and assist learners to identify evidence and to guide learners in portfolio production. Assessors are accessible by e-mail and mobile phone at all times. There is good assessment planning and clear guidance on evidence requirements to prove competence on each NVQ unit. Learners receive clear and appropriate advice and guidance. Staff have received training in the structured delivery of vocational support.

Leadership and management

31. Leadership and management are good. In-Comm has a clear management structure and weekly staff meetings are effective in developing partnerships with other providers and employers to raise awareness of engineering and to encourage learners into engineering. This is particularly effective in the schools programmes.
32. Internal verifiers are appropriately experienced and qualified. Management systems are effective in monitoring learners' progress. Self-assessment is inclusive. The report is accurate, but some of the judgements are descriptive and are not strengths of the organisation. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory. All learners receive a copy of In-Comm Training equal opportunities policy. Equal Opportunities is covered as part of the company induction for learners based in the training centre. However, there is insufficient attention to equal opportunities at the review process.

Business administration and law

Good: Grade 2

Context

33. Currently there are 86 Train to Gain learners on programmes. Ten of the learners follow customer service programmes, 47 are team leadership learners and 18 follow the business administration programme. A further nine learners are working towards NVQ Level 3 management and two are working towards NVQ Level 3 business administration. In-Comm's work-based learning programme has 17 business administration apprentices and five business administration advanced apprentices. Training takes place primarily on employers' premises but some off-the-job training takes place at In-Comm's training centre in Aldridge.

Strengths

- High success rates for customer service and business administration Train to Gain learners.
- Good development of vocational skills.
- Very good assessment practices.
- Effective additional support.
- Good working relationships with employers.
- Good reinforcement of equal opportunities.

Areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates for apprentices and some Train to Gain learners.
- Insufficient individual coaching for business administration and customer service Train to Gain learners.
- Insufficient involvement of company supervisors in the Train to Gain programme.

Achievement and standards

34. Achievement and standards are good. Learners' success rates are good. Current Train to Gain learners on customer service and business administration programmes are achieving high success rates of 80% and 94% respectively. However, the success rate for team leading and management learners is low at 48%. The apprentice success rate for this year has significantly improved to 87%.
35. Learners are developing good vocational skills. Their standard of work is high and they enjoy their learning. For most Train to Gain learners this is their first formal qualification since leaving school. They are articulate and confident when dealing with colleagues and the wider public. Some of the apprentices gain promotion while on programme.
36. Timely success rates are low, both for apprentices and some Train to Gain learners. During the last two years the timely success rate for apprentices was 21% and 27% respectively. However, for current apprentices it has improved to 65%. Current Train to Gain team leadership learners make slow progress with 28% going beyond their planned end date in this year.

Quality of provision

37. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Assessment practice is very good. Assessment planning meetings are focused and well structured and prepare the learners well for their assessments. Very good assessment methods are used and portfolios are of a good quality. Most of the Train to Gain team leading and management NVQ learners are working towards an additional management qualification at In-Comm's training centre. Learners enjoy these sessions and use their understanding from the background knowledge sessions in their vocational training. Most apprentices receive on-the-job training and coaching in the workplace with attendance at In-Comms training centre for key skills and skills development.
38. Company supervisors are insufficiently involved with the Train to Gain learners. Learner reviews are satisfactory but often do not involve their supervisors and do not sufficiently focus on long-term targets. Individual learning plans are not used and do not contain appropriate information on the learning programme for the learners. However, In-Comm training staff monitor progress and set targets to check learners make good progress. Business administration and customer service Train to Gain learners receive insufficient individual coaching. There is little coaching taking place in the workplace for these learners. They do not receive learning materials or assistance in understanding the theory of their vocational programme.

39. Initial assessment is satisfactory. In-Comm provides appropriate literacy, numeracy and key skills support either in the workplace or at their training centre. Learners receive satisfactory information, advice and guidance during their recruitment and their exit review. Train to Gain assessors are appropriately qualified in information, advice and guidance. Induction is satisfactory with particularly good reinforcement of employers' equality of opportunity and health and safety policies, practices and procedures. There is very good promotion of equal opportunities with learners during progress and exit reviews. Learners clearly articulate their understanding of equality of opportunity in their working practices and in their dealings with customers.
40. The way in which learners needs and interests are met is good. In-Comm offers a broad range of additional qualifications. Over three quarters of learners are working towards a supervisory certificate or studying on an introduction to management programme. Many apprentices complete a formal health and safety qualification, first aid training, a telephone technique programme and a half-day's training in equality of opportunity.
41. Guidance and support are good. Additional support for learners is effective. Assessors visit the Train to Gain learners every two weeks and apprentices every four weeks. They offer additional visits should learners' need it. For example, one learner has no time to study at work for the management NVQ and the assessor is dedicating a full day to working with the learner. The few learners made redundant from their jobs receive good and sensitive support by In-Comm in finding new employment and continuing with their learning. In-Comm carry out a thorough training needs analysis of each employer and learner before training starts. Apprentices also receive good support from employers. Learners clearly benefit from extra responsibilities, time off to work on their qualifications and promotion within the company. The programme for all business learners is highly structured with a well planned but flexible assessment programme. Both learners and employers find this very helpful to prepare adequately for assessor visits. Employers provide good quality working environments and very good opportunities for learners to generate their learning evidence

Leadership and management

42. Leadership and management are good. In-Comm has a newly established business team who are working well together. New processes and systems have been introduced and regular team meetings promote sharing of good practice. The good internal verification strategy provides effective feedback to assessors and good access to relevant training and development.
43. Working relationships with employers are good. In-Comm assists employers with their business and training strategies at six-monthly meetings. In-Comm's commitment to training benefits employers, most of whom have worked with In-Comm for many years. Many are increasing the number of employees involved in learning with In-Comm. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the self-assessment report is accurate identifying many of the strengths and areas for improvement found by inspectors. However, although evaluative in places, the self-assessment report contains many descriptive comments on its performance.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning 'apprenticeship' programmes** managed by the provider 2004 year to 2006 year

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	28	57	48	43	31
		timely	32	34	30	25	19
	04-05	overall	19	53	48	47	34
		timely	16	25	31	19	22
	05-06	overall	37	41		35	
		timely	37	27		22	
Apprenticeships	03-04	overall	31	65	47	26	32
		timely	30	37	24	7	16
	04-05	overall	52	62	51	46	39
		timely	76	34	29	26	22
	05-06	overall	68	72		66	
		timely	52	35		30	

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Success rates on **work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes** managed by the provider 2005 year to 2006 year

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain***	05/06	overall	163	80
		timely	131	71

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** College and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

*** Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'Skills for Life'