



TRAINING STANDARDS COUNCIL

INSPECTION REPORT JUNE 2000

IPS International

SUMMARY

IPS International provides outstanding training in engineering, with excellent facilities, a skilled staff team, supportive and well-resourced employers, and good links with local colleges. Over 95 per cent of trainees achieve the level 2 foundation engineering qualification, and around 80 per cent progress and achieve the level 3, and more advanced qualifications. The other occupational areas of business administration and care work are satisfactory, despite an insufficient number of assessors in care, and poor integration of key skills with vocational training in administration. The company makes a concerted effort to develop equal opportunities in many respects, but trainees' awareness of their rights and responsibilities is not systematically reinforced. Pastoral support is good, but trainees' reviews are not always effectively conducted. There is an effective team-based management structure, and all staff are clear about their roles. Arrangements to assure the quality of training are inadequate. Training programmes are not evaluated on a systematic basis.

GRADES

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS	GRADE
Engineering	1
Business administration	3
Health, care & public services	3

GENERIC AREAS	GRADE
Equal opportunities	3
Trainee support	3
Management of training	3
Quality assurance	4

KEY STRENGTHS

- ◆ high achievement and retention rates in engineering
- ◆ outstanding on- and off-the-job training in engineering
- ◆ well-taught administration theory
- ◆ well-designed training materials for care work
- ◆ widespread action taken to further equality of opportunity
- ◆ well-managed staff team

KEY WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic integration of key skills with vocational training
- ◆ inconsistent approach to reviews and initial assessment
- ◆ no systematic checking of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices
- ◆ insufficient assessors available in care
- ◆ lack of systematic evaluation of training programmes

INTRODUCTION

1. IPS International (IPS) is a private limited company which provides training in a range of disciplines. It has a contract with the Learning and Business Link Company, the local training and enterprise council (TEC), to provide work-based training for young people, mainly in the occupational areas of engineering, business administration and care work. IPS was established by a large UK-based steel-producing company, and was the subject of a management buy-out by the current management team in February 2000. It has had contracts with the local TEC since TECs were established, and has been involved with government-funded training programmes for young people since the mid-1980s. Its headquarters and main training facilities are on a trading estate in Rochester, one of the Medway towns. It has other smaller premises in Kent, at Sheerness, Folkestone and Ashford. The company currently employs 22 people on permanent contracts, of whom 12 are entirely or partly involved in work-based training funded by the TEC. This work accounts for about one third of the company's turnover. The other two-thirds comprises fee-paying training and consultancy across the UK.

2. There are 163 young people on training programmes including 58 training in engineering, 68 in care work, and 37 on business administration programmes. Most trainees are on modern apprenticeship programmes, and are employed in local companies, including all but one of those in care work, and all the engineers. Many of those on business administration programmes are not employed but are on work placements on a full-time basis at local companies. Off-the-job training is arranged for most trainees at one of the company's sites. IPS also contracts with local colleges to provide some off-the-job training in engineering, and in care work.

3. All employers are located in Kent, mainly in the Medway towns, in Swale Borough, the Maidstone area and in the south Kent coastal towns. Manufacturing companies account for about 20 per cent of employment in the area, and employers report skills shortages, particularly in engineering and information technology. Ashford is continuing to develop as a centre for distribution companies. Thanet has had the highest unemployment rate in the Southeast of England, outside London, for many years, and has attracted central government and European funding to address this. The Kent population is around 1.3 million, of which fewer than 2 per cent come from minority ethnic groups. In April 2000, 19,000 people were registered as unemployed in Kent, which is a rate of 3.2 per cent. Unemployment ranges from less than 2 per cent in most of west Kent, to 8.5 per cent in Thanet. In the districts of Swale, Folkestone and the Medway towns, the rate is about 4.6 per cent. In 1999, the proportion of school leavers in Kent achieving five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C and above was 50.9 per cent, compared with the national average of 47.9 per cent.

INSPECTION FINDINGS

4. IPS's manager involved all of the team leaders in the self-assessment process. They, in turn, discussed the issues with their respective teams. IPS produced its first self-assessment report in September 1998. Following advice from the TEC, it revised the report it had written in February 2000, and prepared a new self-assessment report and action plan in April. Data regarding trainees' achievements were used to make the judgements, particularly in engineering. Achievement data are less applicable for care work, as training in this area is so new to IPS, and few trainees have completed the programmes. Trainees and their employers were not actively involved with the development of the self-assessment report, other than being informed of the process of inspection. All grades given in the report were within one grade of the inspectors' findings. Despite being self-critical in general, IPS failed to identify some of its weaknesses and inspectors did not agree with others.

5. A team of five inspectors spent a total of 20 days at IPS in the first week of June 2000. During the inspection they visited all of IPS's training sites, a college which provides training to apprentice engineers, and 23 workplaces. They spoke with 84 trainees, 14 of IPS's staff, six college staff and 16 work-based supervisors. They also observed four engineering instruction sessions, and examined a wide range of documents including trainees' files and portfolios, audit reports from the TEC and awarding bodies, records of staff meetings, personnel records, policies and procedures. Two instruction sessions observed at IPS were awarded a grade 1, two sessions observed at a subcontractor were awarded a grade 2 and a grade 3.

OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Engineering

Grade 1

6. IPS's main training centre is located at Rochester. There is a small satellite centre in Ashford. Both centres are used for a variety of engineering purposes by all of the trainees. There are 58 modern apprentices in engineering, and most are employed in large local companies. Nineteen are working towards national vocational qualifications (NVQs) at level 3 in paper manufacturing, 10 in papermaking and nine towards level 3 NVQs in engineering, and the other 39 are working towards NVQs at level 3 in engineering maintenance. For the first 10 months of their training, all trainees attend the training centre at Rochester for four days a week where they work towards a level 2 NVQ in engineering manufacture, a foundation engineering qualification. The remaining day of the week is spent at one of four further education colleges. Most trainees attend the college nearest to the training provider. Over the past three years, over 90 per cent of trainees who started with IPS completed an NVQ at level 2, and over 60 per cent progressed to achieve an NVQ at level 3. Inspectors agreed with the strengths given in the self-assessment report. It included a weakness regarding IPS's failure to obtain timely

information from the local colleges. This weakness is reported on more fully in quality assurance. Inspectors identified further strengths regarding the particularly high level of achievement, the use of college programmes, and the personal development programme. The report failed to note the missed opportunities for key skills accreditation. Inspectors awarded a higher grade than that given by IPS.

GOOD PRACTICE

This is an example of IPS adapting traditional courses in order to meet the precise needs of employers and trainers. IPS brought the college and the employers together to develop a three-year programme to meet the employers' needs for multi-skilled engineers. As well as completing a modern apprenticeship, trainees gain two national certificates, one in electrical, and one in mechanical engineering, giving them a multi-skills national diploma in engineering.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ high retention and achievement rates
- ◆ good use of college programmes to supplement trainees' learning
- ◆ well-planned and -implemented off-the-job training
- ◆ excellent resources
- ◆ good personal development programme
- ◆ particularly good on-the-job learning opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ missed opportunities for key skills accreditation

7. Retention and achievement rates on foundation engineering programmes are extremely good. In 1998-99, 23 trainees joined the programme and 22 achieved an NVQ. In the previous year, of the 15 trainees who started the level 2 foundation NVQ, 14 successfully achieved the qualification. Approximately 80 per cent of trainees progress to achieve an NVQ at level 3. Most of these trainees continue with IPS but some, where it is the employer's policy, transfer to alternative managing agents.

8. Trainees study for a national certificate in plant, electronics and instrumentation, electronics or electrical engineering for two years or for a national diploma in engineering for three years. The content of the national certificate course in plant reflects the requirements of engineering within the local paper making industries and it extends the trainees' knowledge beyond that required for the NVQs at levels 2 and 3. The 60 per cent of trainees who complete an NVQ at level 3 also gain a national diploma. The majority of trainees who gain a national certificate or diploma progress to study engineering at higher national certificate level. Members of IPS's staff attend the college employers' forum and through this have been able to influence the course programme. IPS has trained many staff as assessors. Much assessment is carried out at work. IPS's staff often carry out assessment jointly with employers in the workplace.

9. The training centre is resourced to a high standard with a wide range of modern industrial equipment. The layout of workshops, stores and well-equipped specialist teaching rooms contribute to a purposeful engineering environment. Trainees attending full time off-the-job training clock on and off each day, as they would in the industry. Trainees work in groups of around eight. Wherever possible,

GOOD PRACTICE

A final year apprentice built an extensive control system for his employer. When the company had finished using the system it was donated to the training centre where it is used to train first year apprentices.

supervised trainees install, maintain and upgrade the training centre's facilities as part of their first-year off-the-job training. Trainees speak highly of the opportunity to undertake such tasks and value it as part of their overall learning experience. The ample supply of machines, hand tools and other equipment, together with the small group size, ensures that trainees do not waste time waiting. Local companies have donated surplus items of heavy plant and equipment to the training centre. In some cases, this equipment has been installed in the workshops by trainees and is used for the purpose of teaching and learning. In others, it has been renovated by trainees, returned to the company of origin and reinstalled. The quality of handouts and other learning materials is good and full use is made of a variety of teaching techniques. Resources at the colleges are also good, and the standard of training there is at least satisfactory and often good. Much training in IPS's centre is outstanding.

10. During the first 10 months of training, three separate weeks are devoted to an extensive personal development programme. The objective of these weeks is to develop trainees' self-reliance, team-working, and leadership skills. Exercises include problem solving, financial costing, team selection and evaluation. The highlight of the programme is a walking expedition in the Peak District, which is planned by the trainees. In the early stages of their course trainees form a student council which meets regularly. A chairman and secretary are both elected, the latter being responsible for keeping minutes and records. The officers of the council report issues on resources and teaching to staff. These reports lead to improvements in practice.

11. Employers are fully involved in all stages of trainees' courses. The induction programme at the training centre is supplemented with similar, company-specific sessions which are held at the employers' premises. This involvement by employers continues throughout the duration of the trainees' programmes. Two of the large companies operate a policy of rotating trainees through departments to ensure that they experience all aspects of the company's work. The extensive range of engineering operations undertaken by employers enables the trainees to gain wide experience in tasks which extend beyond the requirements of their NVQ programmes. One employer has provided additional training in motor winding and in polymers. A number of trainees have attended product-specific courses and have used the knowledge gained for their NVQ programmes. Wherever possible, the workplace is used for assessment, and a significant proportion of employers have staff who are qualified assessors. Employers receive records of reviews every month on the progress of their first-year trainees, and most attend the training centre to participate in the process. After the full-time off-the-job period of training, staff from IPS conduct reviews in the workplace on a regular basis and employers' staff participate in the process.

12. Some first-year trainees are unclear about key skills and their requirements. Opportunities to accredit trainees' key skills are missed during training. In one exercise, trainees who had used information technology to produce a report on their induction week were not credited with the appropriate key skill. Similarly, members of the student council did not receive credit for the appropriate key skill. In some cases, final-year trainees have to complete basic key skills assignments in

numeracy at the very end of their level 3 NVQ and higher national certificate studies. The opportunity to acknowledge and accredit the key skills gained during trainees' personal development weeks is not taken. There is insufficient cross-referencing of the common skills required for the national certificate and diploma programmes and the key skills needed for modern apprenticeships.

Business administration

Grade 3

13. IPS has 37 trainees in business administration, of whom 14 are modern apprentices, 13 are national trainees, and 10 are on other youth training programmes. One national trainee is working towards an NVQ in the use of information technology at level 2, one towards an NVQ in accounts at level 2, and the other 35 are working towards NVQs in business administration at levels 2 and 3. Many also work towards key skills and other parts of the modern apprenticeship and national traineeship frameworks. Most modern apprentices take the NVQ at level 2 before progressing to level 3.

14. All trainees are either on a work placement or employed with a variety of local employers ranging from large national organisations to small local companies. Each young person has a supervisor at work, who is responsible for their training and development in their workplace. Three of IPS's staff visit the trainees at work, assess their competence, and plan their development. They also arrange and provide supplementary training either in or away from the workplace, where appropriate, and sometimes on a day-release basis. Four of the national trainees are employed, as are four of the trainees on other training programmes. All of the modern apprentices are already employed by their companies when they join the programme. Half of the trainees on national traineeships and other training programmes are placed by IPS in companies, while the other half are recruited directly by the companies. Most non-employed trainees are given the opportunity to take additional qualifications. This option is also available to employed trainees, but not normally taken up, as they are required to attend weekly day-release sessions. All training and assessment for employed trainees takes place in the workplace. Non-employed trainees attend IPS's centre in Rochester or Sheerness one a day release basis, where they work towards the theory requirements of their qualification, as well as developing their information technology skills. Over the past three years, 60 per cent of young people have achieved their target qualification.

15. Inspectors agreed with two of the strengths and one of the weaknesses identified by IPS in its self-assessment report. IPS also included a strength regarding the tightly knit staff team, and a weakness regarding the limited promotion of equal opportunities' issues to employers. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded the same grade as that given by IPS.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-taught theoretical aspects of the qualifications
- ◆ good progression into employment
- ◆ thorough internal verification process

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient knowledge of programme frameworks by trainees and employers
- ◆ late introduction of key skills work
- ◆ no system for gaining feedback from trainees

16. The theoretical part of the NVQ is covered thoroughly. All trainees work through a series of worksheets for each element, either while on day release at IPS, or at their work placement. All trainees have their own copy of the business administration handbook, which they use to help them to complete the worksheets. Help is also readily available from any of the three training staff. The worksheets are well designed, easy to use, and contain examples of skills and activities which are relevant to the trainees at work. The training staff are patient, clear in their explanations, and work with trainees on an individual basis at their workplaces and in small groups at the off-the-job training centres. Trainees find these instruction sessions useful. They also value the workbooks as they allow them to develop their skills at times convenient to them and to their employers in their workplaces.

17. IPS has a good track record of helping trainees who complete the course to gain permanent employment. If the work placement provider is unable to offer permanent employment, IPS endeavours to find employment with another company. Over the past four years, an average of 77 per cent of trainees who were not employed at the start of their programme gained employment at the end of it.

18. All three business administration training staff are qualified internal verifiers. The internal verification strategy ensures that all units of the NVQ are regularly verified for each assessor. There is both interim and final verification of all trainees' portfolios, which exceeds the awarding body requirements. Detailed written feedback is provided to the assessor, and actions are addressed promptly. The staff observe each other carrying out assessments several times a year. This promotes good practice.

19. Most of the trainees who are well into their national traineeship and modern apprenticeship programmes have little awareness of the requirements of the framework in addition to the main NVQ. A few trainees know that key skills have to be achieved but no trainees have an understanding of what this entails. None of the trainees are aware of the requirements for information technology qualifications and additional NVQ units. A similar lack of understanding exists among employers and work placement providers.

20. Apart from two modern apprentices recruited in 1996, IPS has only started recruiting modern apprentices in the last two years and national trainees in the last year. To date no modern apprentices or national trainees have completed, and on

average, over the last five years, 25 per cent of trainees leave the programme with no qualifications. IPS operates a policy of not introducing key skills into programmes until the main NVQ has been achieved. The intention is that trainees will then cross-reference some of their existing evidence to the key skills requirements and work through assignments to cover any gaps identified. There is no specific training planned for key skills.

21. During reviews, trainees are not asked for their opinions on their training or assessment, either on or off the job. Trainees are not invited to complete questionnaires either during or at the end of their training programme, and no feedback is sought from employers about the training and assessment provided by IPS.

Health, care & public services

Grade 3

22. IPS has only been offering NVQs in care at levels 2 and 3 since April 1999. One of the 68 trainees is a national trainee, and the remainder are modern apprentices. All of the trainees are employed in 30 placements, of which the majority are nursing and residential homes for the elderly, or for people with learning disabilities. Two are in children's services. They are all privately owned establishments. Until March 2000, there was only one care trainer. There are now two staff at IPS, one full time and one part time who support the trainees and their assessors throughout the training programme. One is qualified to assess, internally verify and accredit prior learning, and the other is working towards these awards. All assessment takes place in the workplace. Colleagues at work who either hold the appropriate assessor awards or are working towards them assess approximately two thirds of the trainees. Off-the-job training is provided on a fortnightly basis in one of three centres or is provided in the workplace for those who cannot attend. Many trainees have not been on the programme very long and only one has so far completed an NVQ which was at level 2. During 1999-2000, of the 58 trainees who started training, 10 have left. A further four continue to be assessed towards their qualification but are no longer funded through the TEC as they are now over 25 years old. The company's self-assessment report included a large number of strengths, including those identified by inspectors. Some of these are reported on in the generic areas of this report, and others, for example the emphasis on health and safety, are considered to be no more than normal practice. The self-assessment report included weaknesses regarding key skills, the promotion of equal opportunities to employers and the arrangements for obtaining timesheets from employers. Inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by IPS.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-planned off-the-job training
- ◆ well-designed training materials
- ◆ effective targets set for learning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ insufficient NVQ assessors
- ◆ trainees not fully aware of relevance of key skills to work
- ◆ lack of monitoring and evaluation of trainees' experience

23. Trainees attend workshops at one of three training centres. If trainees are unable to attend these sessions, trainers visit them at their workplaces to provide off-the-job training. At present, trainers visit 17 placements in five areas on a planned and regular, two-weekly basis. Trainees who attend the training centre have some formal training on the mandatory NVQ units. Otherwise the sessions are on a workshop basis where trainees attend and work through projects. The calendar of dates to attend is set on a six-monthly basis which allows managers plenty of time to make plans for trainees to attend. The programme of training sessions is very flexible and some units might take more weeks than originally planned, or the order in which the units are covered may change in response to trainees' requests. As these are not always taught sessions, trainees might be working on different projects at the same time. It is a rolling programme with trainees able to join at any time. New trainees start with an induction pack. Trainees unable to attend a workshop because of work commitments are expected to continue to work on their projects in their workplace. One trainee on the programme opted for one of the NVQ units seldom chosen. The trainer developed a learning package to suit the trainee's particular circumstances and learning needs.

24. Good projects have been developed as distance-learning packs for those NVQ units which are most commonly selected. Projects vary in their content and include some theory work, questions to explore trainees' understanding and activities to carry out or consider in relation to common practice. Trainees are encouraged to relate these activities to their workplace and also have case studies to complete. Most trainees find the projects interesting and easy to follow. Managers of the care establishments report that the training has had a positive impact on the trainees in the workplace, and their work practice has improved. Trainees ask more questions, challenge why activities are carried out in the way that they are and even update procedures, for example health and safety information notices.

25. The off-the-job trainer knows the precise details of each trainee's workplace well, and knows the other staff in the workplaces. She liaises well with the managers in the workplaces, who have a good understanding of the NVQ. The managers and the trainer set the specific targets for what trainees need to learn within a short but achievable timescale. Managers arrange appropriate and thorough off-the-job training in the workplaces. Trainees are inspired by their achievements, are well motivated and keen to learn more.

26. Some trainees do not have an assessor in their workplace. The role then falls to the full-time trainer who is qualified to assess NVQs and there is slow assessment of some trainees. The programme is designed to ensure that trainees have the background knowledge and feel confident before assessment. However,

some trainees have been on the programme for several months without any assessment taking place. Assessment is carried out when the NVQ unit is completed rather than being part of the process, and some opportunities for earlier work-based assessment are missed. Two assessors' meetings have been held. The first was in September 1999 when no-one attended and the second was in May 2000 when three assessors attended. Agendas were sent to all assessors and work placements to encourage those who thought they might like to become assessors to attend as well. The agenda included updated information on the development of IPS's care department, and NVQs, plus information on new paperwork that had been developed, a sample unit for discussion, and reminder of the equal opportunities policy.

27. All key skills are integrated into the care NVQ except for the application of number and some of the information technology. There is no assessment of basic or key skills at the initial meeting between trainees and IPS's staff. The key skills project from which much of the evidence is created for information technology and application of number is not related in any way to the care environment. Although other key skills are integrated into the NVQ work, trainees do not cross-reference this evidence until about two-thirds of the way through their training. Trainees are unclear about how they are meeting the key skills requirements and about their value and practical application in the workplace as they work through their NVQ. Trainees tend to focus on the project as the main source of evidence collection.

28. As the number of trainees increases, systems to monitor and evaluate the trainees' experience are being developed. Trainers are presently looking at developing systems to evaluate the trainees' experience during and at the end of the programme. A letter has recently been drafted which is to be sent to employers who cancel planned training sessions in the placement. The current system for monitoring trainees' progress relies on trainees completing a wall chart in the training room identifying where they have completed the project and when they have been assessed. Trainees also have monitoring forms in their portfolios but few keep these up to date. Trainers are now developing their own form to monitor progress and a document to ensure that reviews are held on time.

GENERIC AREAS

Equal opportunities

Grade 3

29. IPS developed its equal opportunities policy and procedures during 1999. A director has responsibility for equal opportunities. Trainees are given a copy of the policy during their induction. There are clear policies and procedures for grievance and harassment. All employers and work placement providers are required to sign that they will adhere to equal opportunities legislation in respect of IPS's trainees. IPS's main training centre is on the ground floor and has ramp access and wide doors for those with mobility difficulties. Three per cent of engineering trainees are women, and in care and business administration the proportion of male trainees is 17 and 25 per cent respectively. Of the 163 trainees at IPS, three are from

minority ethnic groups and two have learning disabilities. In the area of Kent in which IPS operates, the average proportion of the population from minority ethnic groups is 1.5 per cent. The inspectors agreed with one of the strengths in the self-assessment report but with none of the weaknesses. Inspectors identified additional strengths and weaknesses. The grade awarded is the same as that given in the self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed resolution of equal opportunities issues
- ◆ widespread action taken to promote training opportunities

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic checking of employers' equal opportunities policies and practices
- ◆ poor understanding by some trainees of equal opportunities

30. Most trainees are well aware of who to talk to should they have a grievance or complaint. They know that if they have any concerns at all about their workplace, or about anyone in their workplace, they can contact their trainer. They know that the trainer will listen to them and support their point of view. However, some employed trainees are not clear on the complaint and grievance procedures. For most trainees, this awareness is reinforced at the frequent reviews of their progress. Trainees are asked at each review if they have any equal opportunities issues they wish to discuss. At each site any unusual occurrences or issues are recorded in a daybook. Complaints are rare. There has been one complaint of suspected bullying. Staff immediately investigated in a professional and sympathetic manner. They found that there had been some bullying, and dealt with the matter quickly and effectively to the complainant's satisfaction. The manager was kept informed at all stages.

31. Equal opportunities issues are discussed at the regular meetings held between the general manager and the team leaders. Ways of increasing the number of female engineering trainees and the number of trainees with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups have been explored. IPS has been involved in sponsoring an engineering design competition, in which 30 schools participated, and which was won by a girls' school. Recent advertisements for engineering trainees include IPS's commitment to the 'Women into Engineering' programme. It has a comprehensive action plan for equal opportunities in its self-assessment report, which is monitored and updated. One attempt has been made recently to increase both staff and employers' awareness of equal opportunities through a seminar. This event was not well attended, but the details were circulated to over 70 local employers to help to bring the issues to their attention.

32. The implementation of IPS's equal opportunities policy is monitored by analysing recruitment data and through staff appraisals, during which questionnaires are given to staff which include a number of questions on equal

opportunities. IPS monitors employers and work placement providers' compliance with equal opportunities legislation using feedback from trainees. There is no systematic monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities procedures.

33. Although the recruitment procedures for employed trainees state that all employers are asked to inform IPS of their policies and practices regarding equal opportunities, this does not happen in all occupational areas. In business administration, the employers and work placement providers are asked to sign a statement that they will not treat IPS's trainees in an unfair manner. However, there is no system for monitoring whether they have equal opportunities policies and procedures, and whether the trainees are aware of and understand them.

34. The induction programme for all trainees, except those in engineering, only briefly covers equal opportunities. Some trainees have little understanding of equal opportunities issues, and many do not recall being asked about equal opportunities issues during reviews. During induction, all trainees are given a copy of IPS's equal opportunities policy but, contrary to the induction procedures, only the non-employed business administration trainees are informed of the disciplinary, grievance and harassment policies and procedures.

Trainee support

Grade 3

35. Most trainees are referred to IPS by their employer, and interviewed by a member of IPS's staff. These employers select trainees according to their own criteria. All trainees complete an induction programme with IPS which varies across the different occupational areas. All induction programmes include an explanation of the qualification, the programme, and how the off-the-job learning is arranged. Training staff assess trainees to decide the most appropriate level of qualification, and programme. Trainees also have an induction with their employer. Trainees with learning difficulties are given individual help and an extra-large computer screen is provided for those with eyesight problems. Some trainees have progress reviews with IPS's staff at three-monthly intervals, others more frequently. Inspectors did not agree with all the strengths and weaknesses given in the self-assessment report. They identified additional strengths and weaknesses and awarded a lower grade than that given by IPS.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ thorough and effective induction
- ◆ good support for individuals' specific learning needs
- ◆ celebration of trainees' achievements

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no systematic initial assessment of trainees' basic and key skills

- ◆ inadequate accreditation of trainees' prior learning
- ◆ inconsistent approach to reviews between different occupational areas

36. Induction in all occupational areas includes health and safety information and is specifically designed for the particular needs of trainees in that discipline. Most trainees have an induction into their workplace. Care trainees then undertake various projects on a wide range of issues related to the work environment, which takes several weeks. All trainees are given a comprehensive guide introducing them to the NVQ process, terminology, portfolio building, evidence collection, assessment and verification, accreditation of prior learning and the appeals procedure. Trainees are issued with a copy of IPS's equal opportunities policy, complete an equal opportunities monitoring form and, in the case of care, also a confidentiality agreement, before completing an induction checklist. In engineering, the induction covers health and safety, internal procedures, NVQ structure, the ideas behind competence-based education and training, equal opportunities, risk assessment and career aims. It is well recorded and provides a good grounding to the course that trainees have joined. Administration trainees have a one-day induction and are given three assignments to be completed in the first eight weeks.

37. Trainers provide good pastoral support across all the occupational areas, whether dealing with sensitive personal issues, accompanying trainees to job interviews, helping them to access benefits, dealing with senior staff, or providing extra training. One trainee in engineering was diagnosed as being dyslexic and his programme was adjusted to concentrate on specific areas. The method of assessment was altered and specially enlarged diagrams were used, verbal testing was instigated and additional time was made available for written answer tests. Another trainee was identified as having sight problems. Staff made arrangements for the trainee to be equipped with special glasses and altered their teaching techniques to simplify complicated drawings.

38. Trainees' achievements are celebrated in a variety of ways. Awards evenings for administration and engineering trainees form a pivotal part of their training year. These have been established for a number of years. For engineering trainees, local and national bodies sponsor various cash awards and commemorative cups. Awards ceremonies are well attended by parents, employers, the local TEC and the local further education college. The parents of former engineering trainees have sponsored a cup. Care trainees are put forward for national awards and a qualification awarding body's medal for excellence.

39. There is no systematic initial assessment of the basic and key skills of any trainees except non-employed administration trainees. Engineering trainees go through a thorough selection process, which is carried out using national aptitude tests in numerical reasoning, mechanical comprehension and fault diagnosis. The results of these tests are referenced to national norms. Where appropriate, potential trainees are also invited for a personal interview with IPS and employers. Care trainees are assessed on their basic and key skills during their induction process

but this is not recorded and is not systematic.

40. In some cases, where initial assessment is carried out and trainees are asked about their occupational experience and qualifications already gained, this information is not used to produce training plans. These tend to be standardised and are not updated when reviews are undertaken, only when a significant change occurs, for example, when a trainee changes address or programme. All administration trainees are required to complete NVQs at level 2 first, irrespective of any previous training or experience.

41. There is an inconsistent approach to reviews between the different occupational areas and sometimes within them. For example, business administration trainees do not have an opportunity to speak with their trainer without the assessor being present. Care trainees are often reviewed in the training session rather than the workplace, and assessors are seen individually. Trainees then see the review record before it is signed. In engineering, most trainees are reviewed frequently throughout the training programme. Targets are set and adherence to them is monitored. Reviews are recorded, not on the training plan but using an internally generated document. Reviews are recorded differently across all areas and the procedures for their filing vary. In care, trainees and assessors do not routinely receive a copy of the review record, although they are available should trainees wish to see them. In engineering, trainees have the opportunity to make a written comment on their perception of the review and their progress to date.

Management of training

Grade 3

42. One of the three board directors, is responsible for all the government-funded training, the 10 training staff who work with the trainees, and the four administrative staff. There are two engineering team leaders, and one for each of the other occupational areas. Some of these training and administrative staff have other responsibilities, including providing training on a fee-paying basis, mainly to employees of local large companies. A second director oversees privately funded technical engineering training, while the third takes responsibility for sales and marketing. A director, the administrative support team and most of the five engineering training staff are based at the headquarters in Rochester. Sheerness is the main base for the three business administration training staff, and the two care training staff are based in Folkestone. Only those documents necessary to facilitate the monthly financial claim to the TEC are kept centrally. Most paperwork relating to present and previous trainees is kept by the training staff at their respective site. IPS has had contracts for training young people in engineering and in business administration for some years. It has been providing training in care for about 15 months. Before the management buy-out in February, all directors and staff were employees of the former parent company, with the exception of the newly recruited part-time care trainer. In 1991, the current managing director was a leading member of the team which helped the former parent company to be one of the first in the country to achieve the Investors in People Standard. The company

was re-accredited in 1994, again in 1997 and is due to be assessed against the standards later this year. The company gave a mix of strengths and weaknesses in its self-assessment report. Although they identified other strengths and weaknesses, inspectors agreed with the grade given in its self-assessment report.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ well-managed staff team
- ◆ detailed and effective staff appraisal system
- ◆ strong focus on individual trainees' learning by all staff and management
- ◆ good links with external organisations and networks

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ no clear strategy for integrating key skills with training programmes
- ◆ insufficient focus on achievement, retention and progression data in management reporting
- ◆ insufficient staff for care training

43. IPS's staff work well together, both in their specialist teams and as a group. All are clear about the organisational aims, and the short-term objectives. A structured series of meetings enables the board directors to communicate directly with the staff, and allows individual staff to raise issues of interest or concern. Team leaders from each occupational area meet on a monthly basis to review progress against the TEC contract, and to discuss any particular concerns, whether regarding individual trainees, or more generally. Team leaders are given a high degree of autonomy over how they run their occupational areas, and decide within their teams the precise responsibilities of their colleagues. Communication between the director in Rochester and the business administration and care training staff is good, with frequent visits made to the satellite training centres as well as contact by telephone and facsimile. Neither the Sheerness nor the Folkestone site is accessible by electronic mail.

44. As part of their annual appraisal, all staff complete a self-appraisal form. They find this effective in helping them to focus on their strengths, weaknesses, and development needs. The managers' reports are thoughtful and assiduously completed. Appraisal is well linked to staff development. A number of staff have started courses as a direct result of their appraisal, although staff training is often arranged at other times, as a result of requests from staff or their managers, and, depending on the cost and perceived benefits, approval from a director.

45. The director knows the circumstances of many of the trainees, and discusses individual trainees with the team leaders. There is widespread understanding of the organisation's focus on individual trainees' needs, as well as an appreciation of the commercial operating environment. IPS has systems to investigate and support any trainee who appears not to be progressing sufficiently well, or who leaves prematurely. At monthly meetings, a director asks for a summary of each trainee's

progress. Any trainees falling behind in their work are quickly identified and action is taken.

46. The directors and other staff have developed effective links with other organisations, networks and partnerships to develop new ideas, to learn from others and to improve the training process. One of the directors is the deputy chairman of the local training provider network. He and another director are active members of a local learning partnership, the local chamber of commerce, a local economic forum, and the engineering sector group of companies chaired by the TEC. Staff have good links with local schools, with the careers service, and with employers. The engineering training staff have been working with a local school to help them to build a robot for a television programme, in order to encourage interest in engineering and make school pupils aware of IPS and its modern apprenticeship programmes.

47. Key skills teaching is insufficiently integrated with vocational skills in all three occupational areas. ISP has no clear strategy to improve this situation.

48. Although team leaders meet monthly, and report on individual trainee progress to a director, they do not prepare any reports on trainees' achievement, retention or progression rates. The main measure of achievement is the TEC contract. Team leaders are not always clear about how their trainees' performance compares with those in other occupational sectors, or in previous years.

49. There are more TEC-funded trainees in care work than in any other of IPS's occupational areas, and yet this area has the lowest number of staff, with just one full-time and one part-time employee. The part-time employee joined only recently, the post being advertised on completion of the management buy-out in February. Insufficient time has been allowed for these staff to recruit, brief and induct employers and trainees, and to train, assess and verify them across a wide geographical area, as well as to maintain and develop the training centre and stock of materials. They also have other duties including training and assessing employees of the care homes to become qualified assessors.

Quality assurance

Grade 4

50. IPS has a quality assurance policy, system and procedures covering the range of its training and business operation. Copies of the quality assurance system are held at all sites. Staff are kept informed about updates and amendments. The three occupational training areas have established operational systems and procedures. These working practices form the basis of IPS's quality assurance business and training strategy. One director and the four occupational team leaders have responsibility for ensuring the quality of for work-based learning and assessment. The work-based staff team of 10 is small enough to enable informal interaction to maintain and improve standards. An administrator supports the work-based training staff and is subject to the same quality assurance systems and procedures. IPS conducts three different types of meetings with a range of staff. At monthly meetings, all staff debate work-based training. The director, the four occupational

team leaders and the support team leader meet monthly to monitor contractual compliance and to deal with operational, quality and equal opportunities issues. A board meeting is also held monthly to discuss and debate the adult commercial training and work-based training programmes. IPS holds a contract with one TEC for its work-based training. The TEC sets targets and audits IPS for compliance. The company's self-assessment report included some strengths which were either neutral statements or merely compliance with the TEC contract. The inspectors awarded a lower grade than that given by IPS.

STRENGTHS

- ◆ clear roles and responsibilities for quality assurance
- ◆ regular evaluation of training materials
- ◆ effective self-assessment and action planning

WEAKNESSES

- ◆ lack of systematic evaluation of training programmes
- ◆ poor response to some external audits
- ◆ insufficient use of statistical data to make improvements
- ◆ inadequate service level agreements with engineering colleges

51. IPS's work-based training has a clearly defined structure and staff responsibilities are clear. A director has overall responsibility for quality assurance and work-based training. Each of the occupational team leaders has the responsibility of ensuring that their teams comply with the quality assurance systems and procedures. During the company monthly meetings, all work-based training staff are informed of any amendments and additions. During these meetings, staff have the opportunity to suggest and debate new initiatives. These monthly meetings are not minuted and do not have a specified agenda.

52. Training materials in all areas are of a good quality. Training staff regularly review their materials, and update them, or create additional materials where necessary. Care trainees' learning materials have recently been developed in accordance with the new NVQ programme. Through their trainee council, engineering trainees have evaluated their learning materials and suggested improvements. The engineering training materials have since been improved, which has been appreciated by the trainees and their employers.

53. IPS produced its first self-assessment report in 1998, and developed an action plan. This action plan enabled IPS to evaluate its work-based learning against a national framework for the first time. Some of the original action points have been implemented, with the remainder being carried over into the current self-assessment report. IPS has begun to establish its work-based training business strategy around the Training Standards Council's framework. The director and the occupational team leaders were instrumental in developing the current self-

assessment report. The remaining work-based training staff had an opportunity to comment during the monthly meetings. Trainees and their employers were not actively involved with the development of the self-assessment report, other than being informed of the process of inspection. There is some sharing of good practice between the three occupational areas. The internal verification in all of IPS' training centres meets the requirements of the awarding bodies.

54. IPS does not conduct an internal audit to check its own performance, nor does it systematically evaluate its training as a whole. There is little systematic evaluation of trainees and their employers across the three occupational areas, or of the other organisations involved in the training programmes, including colleges, and other assessors. IPS relies on the occupational team leaders to audit their own performance, and to monitor the training in that area.

55. The TEC and awarding bodies audit IPS's training systems and procedures. Not all of the action points raised are addressed by the time of the next audit. In business administration and engineering, external verifiers have identified specific action points. Some of the action points in engineering were not successfully met within two further visits, in particular points relating to communication with subcontractors and the delay of assessors and internal verifiers achieving qualifications. Some of the responses to the business administration verifier's report were slow.

56. IPS does not systematically measure the achievement, progression and retention rates of its trainees across the three occupational areas. This information is not systematically reported to the managers, nor is it analysed. IPS does not make comparative judgements regarding its performance, nor does it analyse the reasons for improving or deteriorating performance.

57. IPS has service level agreements with employers and further education colleges. The engineering colleges' service level agreements lack precision in some key areas, in particular regarding the colleges' responsibilities, and the action to be taken, should the colleges' standard fall below the standard specified in the agreement. The quality of trainees' progress reports and the frequency with which they are generated by the college is poor. The report for the engineering technician programmes carried out at college is not shared with IPS. Neither IPS nor the employers are regularly provided with clear attendance records. Although some of the colleges have provided a poor service in these respects for some time, these issues have not been satisfactorily addressed through a more tightly drafted contract, or service level agreement.