

INSPECTION REPORT

In-Comm Training Services Ltd

24 July 2003



ADULT LEARNING
INSPECTORATE

Grading

Inspectors use a seven-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The descriptors for the seven grades are:

- *grade 1 - excellent*
- *grade 2 - very good*
- *grade 3 - good*
- *grade 4 - satisfactory*
- *grade 5 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 6 - poor*
- *grade 7 - very poor.*

Inspectors use a five-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes quality assurance and equality of opportunity. The descriptors for the five grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - unsatisfactory*
- *grade 5 - very weak.*

The two grading scales relate to each other as follows:

SEVEN-POINT SCALE	FIVE-POINT SCALE
grade 1	grade 1
grade 2	
grade 3	grade 2
grade 4	grade 3
grade 5	grade 4
grade 6	grade 5
grade 7	

Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learndirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the *Common Inspection Framework* by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

Overall judgement

Where the overall judgement is that the provision is adequate, only those aspects of the provision which are less than satisfactory will be reinspected.

Provision will normally be deemed to be inadequate where:

- more than one third of published grades for occupational/curriculum areas, **or**
- leadership and management are judged to be less than satisfactory.

This provision will be subject to a full reinspection.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning. A statement as to whether the provision is adequate or not is included in the summary section of the inspection report.

INSPECTION REPORT

In-Comm Training Services Ltd

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INSPECTION REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. In-Comm Training Services Ltd (In-Comm Training) is a private limited company. The company is owned by three shareholders, two of whom are its managing directors. In April 2001, the company was re-structured and its business section became In-Comm Business Services Ltd. Both companies are based in the same premises in Aldridge, West Midlands. Learners are employed across the West Midlands. The company continues to work in partnership with three local Group Training Associations.
2. The senior management team of both companies consists of the two managing directors, a training services manager and a business services manager. There are a further 21 staff.
3. In-Comm Training provides work-based learning for 105 young people funded by the Black Country Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The company provides foundation and advanced modern apprenticeships and national vocational qualifications (NVQs). It also trains learners in customer services, although at the time of the inspection, there were too few learners for this provision to be inspected and graded separately. Some of the background knowledge training for engineering learners is subcontracted to local colleges.
4. The Aldridge wards in Walsall are the main source of referrals to the programmes. These wards have a minority ethnic population of three per cent, compared with an overall figure of 13.4 per cent for Walsall. The proportion of school leavers in Walsall with five or more general certificates of secondary education (GCSEs) at grade C or above is lower than the national average. In 2001, it was 40.6 per cent, compared with 47.9 per cent for England as a whole.

SCOPE OF PROVISION

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

5. There are 54 learners employed on work-based learning programmes in engineering. Thirty-seven are advanced modern apprentices, 14 are foundation modern apprentices and three are following NVQ programmes. In addition, 16 new learners are taking part in a generic induction in the training centre before proceeding onto an appropriate vocational programme. Training is planned to take between six months and four years. Learners follow an NVQ at level 2 in performing engineering operations in their first year of training. This training takes place at the training centre or more recently, for some learners, on employers' premises. Advanced modern apprentices attend a college of further education to gain the background knowledge for the NVQ. Additional courses are provided to meet the needs of individual learners and employers. Assessment takes place in the workplace every four weeks and is carried out by qualified assessors from In-Comm Training. Learners' progress is reviewed in the workplace every 12 weeks.

Business administration, management & professional

6. There are 33 learners following business administration programmes. Ten are advanced modern apprentices, 22 are foundation modern apprentices, and one is working towards an NVQ at level 2. All but one of the learners are women. Seven of the advanced modern apprentices and eight of the foundation modern apprentices are working towards the new modern apprenticeship framework, which means they need to complete an induction workbook on their employment rights and responsibilities, and a technical certificate, as well as their NVQ, key skills award, and extra qualifications. Learners work in administration roles, generally in small engineering companies in Birmingham and the Black Country. Five advanced modern apprentices have access to a work-based assessor. The others are visited monthly by a trainer/assessor. Learners do not attend the centre for regular training, although they can join in specific commercial courses such as telephone techniques, or arrange individual coaching.

ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Number of inspectors	5
Number of inspection days	20
Number of learner interviews	36
Number of staff interviews	23
Number of employer interviews	18
Number of subcontractor interviews	1
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	1
Number of partner/external agency interviews	4
Number of visits	24

OVERALL JUDGEMENT

7. The quality of provision is not adequate to meet the reasonable needs of those receiving it. More specifically, the quality of work-based learning in engineering is satisfactory, but in business administration is unsatisfactory. The leadership and management of the company and its quality assurance arrangements are unsatisfactory. In-Comm Training's approach to equality of opportunity is satisfactory.

GRADES

grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = unsatisfactory, grade 5 = very weak

Leadership and management	4
Contributory grades:	
Equality of opportunity	3
Quality assurance	4

Engineering, technology & manufacturing	3
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	3

Business administration, management & professional	4
Contributory grades:	
Work-based learning for young people	4

KEY FINDINGS

Achievement and standards

8. **Most engineering learners are producing written and practical work of a very high standard.** Portfolios of evidence are well presented and evidence is varied. Learners are now working well and are on target to achieve their qualifications in the intended timescale. Previous slow progress with key skills training and qualifications has been rectified, and the quality and standard of work has improved significantly. **Business administration learners' work is generally well developed and clearly presented.** Learners are proud of the work in their portfolios, and are clear about how it meets the standards required.

9. **Retention rates show an improving trend.** Of the 30 business administration modern apprentices who started in 2002-03, 83 per cent are still in learning. The retention rate was 44 per cent in 2000.

10. **In engineering, learners have good achievement rates for additional qualifications.** Most gain between two and four additional NVQ units at level 2. All complete health and safety, and regulatory qualifications, and many gain additional college qualifications. Courses are designed to meet employers' requirements.

11. Achievement rates are satisfactory for learners following engineering NVQs. Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, 62 per cent achieved their qualifications. A further 8 per cent are still in learning.

12. **Business administration learners following NVQ programmes have low achievement rates.** In 1998-99, 47 per cent of the 19 learners who started NVQ programmes achieved their qualification, but since then, three of the four new learners have left without completing their NVQ.

13. **Achievement rates on modern apprenticeship programmes are low.** Advanced engineering learners who started in 1998-99 and 1999-2000 averaged a 31 per cent success rate, and 30 per cent are still in learning. Of the 22 business administration advanced modern apprentices who started their qualification between 1997-98 and

2000-01, only three completed their full modern apprenticeship framework. There has been no achievement by engineering foundation modern apprentices, although 14 of the 25 recruited since 2000-01 are still in learning. Of the 47 business administration foundation modern apprentices who started between 1998-99 and 2001-02, only four have completed their modern apprenticeship framework, although seven are still in training.

Quality of education and training

Grades awarded to learning sessions

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Total
Engineering, technology & manufacturing	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	5
Total	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	5

14. **Engineering learners receive good practical training.** Teaching is good at the training centre and learners achieve well in these sessions. Of the five learning sessions observed by inspectors, in engineering two were satisfactory, two were good and one was very good. The standard of practical work is high and learners make tools that they can use later.

15. **In engineering, the recent key skills provision is effective.** Key skills training is now started at the earliest opportunity. Assessors carry out key skills training sessions with individual learners in the workplace. This high level of personal training motivates learners. Learners and employers now demonstrate a good understanding of key skills, identify appropriate work evidence and produce well-structured portfolios.

16. **Engineering learners gain a wide range of skills and experiences in good-quality work placements.** Highly skilled work is carried out in progressive, modern businesses. Many have well-researched training plans. Employers arrange for learners to gain experience of different departments, in order to cover key aspects of production processes.

17. Resources for engineering learners are satisfactory. There are new resources at the training centre for computer-aided engineering, however, it is not possible for tutors to network effectively with learners' machines. There are insufficient milling machines of a reasonable standard for the numbers of learners in training.

18. On- and off-the-job assessment is satisfactory for engineering learners. Assessments are carried out continuously at the training centre. Assessors visit learners in the workplace every four weeks. Assessment techniques have improved, as has learners' progress towards the completion of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Internal verification is satisfactory, but there is no overall plan to ensure that all learners are identified and available for sampling.

19. There is satisfactory pastoral support for learners in engineering. Assessors and training officers visit learners in the workplace frequently. **Learners receive good individual support and there is a rapid response to any problems.** Most employers are supportive of the training.

20. **There is weak initial assessment of learners' needs.** In engineering, initial assessment includes literacy and numeracy testing, but there is little planning to ensure that the identified needs are met. The results of tests are not always recorded on individual learning plans. Some learners do not have records of their test results or copies of their individual learning plan. Individual learning plans are not updated following learners' progress reviews.

21. **Induction to engineering programmes is poor when conducted by In-Comm Training staff in the workplace.** It is often late, in some cases four to six months after training starts. Learners have little recollection of their induction and do not receive adequate information. **Learners at the training centre now have a comprehensive induction over five days.**

22. **Business administration learners benefit from the excellent relationships In-Comm Training has with employers.** Employers contribute time and effort to support their young apprentices. Many employers offer extra courses to the apprentices.

23. **The company uses the full range of options available within the administration NVQ to make sure that the learning programmes match the learners' job roles.** Employers appreciate that if they want to change what their learner does at work, it is usually possible to find an NVQ unit to match the new requirements.

24. **There is no programme of training to prepare business administration learners for the NVQ, key skills, or new framework requirements.** Learners receive individual coaching from their assessor to help them prepare for assessments, but there has been no attempt by In-Comm Training to teach learners the skills and background knowledge they need.

25. **There are no resources specifically for the business administration programme.** Learners are not given any handouts or textbooks, although a wide range of videos on management topics is available for them to borrow from the training centre. The trainer/assessor has materials on her laptop computer to help learners with key skills training, and to update information about employment legislation, but these are not generally used.

26. **Assessment for the business administration NVQ and key skills qualification is well-planned and methodical.** However, some portfolios contain pieces of work with errors in spelling and grammar which have not been corrected. Some of this work has also been sampled for internal verification and no comments have been made.

27. **Arrangements to support learners on business administration programmes are ineffective.** Most learners are given an initial assessment to ascertain their level of key skills. Some assessments have not been marked. Some learners also take literacy and numeracy screening tests. The results are not always shared with the learner or recorded on the individual learning plan. Where learning needs are indicated there is no reference to how they will be met. There is no assessment of prior learning. Some individual

learning plans do not make it clear which version of the administration framework learners are working towards. The individual learning plans are frequently inaccurate, and are not generally referred to in the review process.

Leadership and management

28. **In-Comm Training and In-Comm Business Service Ltd have a clear business planning process.** Plans are communicated effectively to staff. Staff are able to participate in different areas of the business through sector teams.

29. **In-Comm Training has recently introduced effective methods for monitoring learners' progress** as part of a strategy to deal with low achievement rates for modern apprenticeship frameworks. Individual meetings between assessors and directors ensure that any slow progress by learners is identified and action is taken.

30. **The company has good partnerships with employers, which promote effective opportunities for learning.** Long-standing partnerships with group training associations give learners access to a range of training and employment opportunities. There are very effective partnerships with local schools to promote engineering as a career.

31. There is a clear management structure in the engineering department. Staff meetings are held every week. Some learners are confused about the roles of staff responsible for reviews and assessment.

32. Staff training is satisfactory. Staff have access to a range of short courses and professional updating. Engineering assessors gain experience of new equipment at the partner companies.

33. **The management and quality assurance of subcontracted training is weak.** For some of the subcontracted provision there are no service level agreements. In-Comm Training does not check the quality of the engineering training provided by the local further education colleges.

34. **The management of the business administration programme is inadequate.** Many of the weaknesses identified by inspectors did not appear in the self-assessment report. In-Comm Training has not planned adequately for the introduction of the new business administration modern apprenticeship framework. The new frameworks have been in place for seven months, but In-Comm Training has not yet developed any materials for learners, or a coherent approach to supporting learners' own research. **Good practice is not shared sufficiently between the two areas of learning.**

35. **Literacy and numeracy support is weak.** The company requires learners to have minimum levels of literacy and numeracy before joining the programmes. It has recently introduced literacy and numeracy assessment for learners. The results of the assessment are not used to shape the learners' programmes. There is no system to support learners with other identified needs, for example, with spelling or punctuation.

36. **In-Comm Training has good initiatives to widen participation from some under-represented groups.** For example, the company works closely with the local university on an initiative to involve women in engineering training and careers.

37. The company has a detailed equal opportunities policy, but it is not always kept up to date. The company has recently circulated publicity material to the local Asian business group. So far, this has not increased enquiries and recruitment from the Asian community. The company has recently produced a simple, clear leaflet for learners and employers outlining recent equal opportunities legislation. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of the appeals and complaints procedures.

38. **In 2002-03, In-Comm Training has reviewed its approach to equal opportunities and produced a detailed development plan to improve its performance in this area.** Its premises have been made more accessible in response to recent disability legislation. A member of staff has taken over the role of co-ordinator for equal opportunities and has recently provided training sessions for all staff. Some of the new initiatives are too recent to have affected the experiences of the learners.

39. **The discussion of equal opportunities at learners' progress reviews is cursory and inadequate.** Engineering learners who have joined the company in the past month have received a detailed training session on equality of opportunity.

40. Staff awareness of In-Comm Training's detailed quality assurance procedures is patchy. Sector teams have been established within the past two years to look at core business activities, including a quality assurance team, a key skills team and an internal verification team. There is no clear evidence that the meetings have any impact on the quality of learning.

41. **There is insufficient quality assurance of learning.** There are internal quality assurance audit processes which cover the activities of the business services division but they do not cover training, assessment, internal verification or learning. In-Comm Training's own team have carried out some observations of learning sessions. These are insufficiently thorough and concentrate on teaching and the classroom environment. The observations documents contain no comments on whether learning is taking place. However, there is close monitoring of engineering learners' performance on the level 2 qualifications, and any issues identified for action are dealt with promptly.

42. **There is no quality assurance of the work of the internal verifiers.** There are inconsistencies in approach between the internal verifiers for the two areas of learning. Internal verifiers have not trained business administration assessors to deal with the new modern apprenticeship framework, or identified the uncorrected spelling and grammar mistakes in learners' portfolios. They have not challenged and improved assessment practice.

43. The company uses a questionnaire to gather feedback from learners. The results are analysed. However, the questionnaires ask very superficial questions and do not seek learners' views on improving the programmes.

44. The company's approach to self-assessment is not yet satisfactory. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process and development plans are thorough, but amendments are not passed on to the staff quickly enough. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently self-critical. It contains some of the weaknesses identified by inspectors but not others. The significance of some weaknesses is underestimated. Inspectors did not find evidence to substantiate all the identified strengths.

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Leadership and management

Strengths

- clear business planning process
- effective recent monitoring of learners' progress
- good partnerships

Weaknesses

- weak management of subcontractors
- inadequate management of business administration programmes
- weak literacy and numeracy support
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities at learners' progress reviews
- insufficient quality assurance of learning

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Strengths

- good rate of achievement of additional qualifications
- good practical training
- recent effective key skills training
- good-quality work placements
- effective partnerships to promote engineering

Weaknesses

- low achievement rate for modern apprenticeship frameworks
- weak initial assessment
- poor induction for some learners

Business administration, management & professional

Strengths

- supportive employers
- good matching of the programme to learners' and employers' needs

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- no background knowledge training for business administration learners
- little use of resources to support learning
- uncorrected errors in spelling and grammar in learners' portfolios
- ineffective support arrangements for learners
- poor response to the challenge of the new modern apprenticeship framework

WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT IN-COMM TRAINING SERVICES LTD:

- the friendly, approachable assessors and instructors
- work-based learning - 'I'd rather do something like this than be sat in a classroom'
- the support they receive - 'Whenever I've needed any help it's just a phone call away'
- the help they get to gain employment
- good practical training in engineering

WHAT LEARNERS THINK IN-COMM TRAINING SERVICES LTD COULD IMPROVE:

- the response to telephone calls - it takes too long for staff to return calls
- the communication between assessors and reviewers when pastoral and vocational reviews are carried out separately

KEY CHALLENGES FOR IN-COMM TRAINING SERVICES LTD:

- improve the achievement rate for modern apprenticeship frameworks
- improve organisational understanding of diversity issues
- develop quality assurance for learning
- improve the initial assessment process
- improve literacy and numeracy assessment and provision
- develop a strategy to provide the new modern apprenticeship frameworks for administration
- provide training in business administration
- increase the thoroughness of assessment in business administration

DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Grade 4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- clear business planning process
- effective recent monitoring of learners' progress
- good partnerships

Weaknesses

- weak management of subcontractors
- inadequate management of business administration programmes
- weak literacy and numeracy support
- inadequate promotion of equal opportunities at learners' progress reviews
- insufficient quality assurance of learning

45. In-Comm Training and In-Comm Business Services Ltd have a clear business planning process. The main business plan is supplemented by a range of detailed development plans, covering areas such as equal opportunities, finance, human resources, and information technology (IT). The plans are communicated effectively to staff. The company has regular discussion days involving all staff. Staff are able to participate in, and influence, different areas of the business through sector teams. These allow managers to draw on a range of staff expertise. The company has set targets to improve learners' achievement rates, but these have not yet been allocated to staff.

46. In-Comm Training has recently introduced effective methods for monitoring learners' progress as part of its strategy to improve the completion rate of modern apprenticeships. The management information system has been revised. The new system effectively identifies learners who are making slow progress. Learners' completion of units is compared with their expected completion rate. Directors effectively check the overall progress of learners. Meetings between assessors and directors ensure that any problems which might affect learners' progress are identified and resolved. The management information system is linked to the assessors' diaries and enables them to plan reviews and assessments effectively.

47. In Comm Training has very productive partnerships with other organisations. Good partnerships with employers promote good learning environments. Long-standing partnerships with the group training associations give learners access to a range of training and employment opportunities. Employers' forums are held regularly to identify areas of good practice. Partnerships with local schools are used effectively to promote engineering as a career. One scheme involves a whole class in work-based learning

opportunities. The company regularly attends, and helps to plan, local careers events. A partnership with a local university promotes careers and higher education for women in engineering. In-Comm works well with other local providers. It is the lead partner in a proposal for a centre of vocational excellence to develop e-learning for staff in engineering companies.

48. Staff training is satisfactory. Staff have access to a range of courses and professional updating. All staff have an annual appraisal which is used to identify their training needs and set performance targets. Some staff do not fully understand these targets and some are confused about their roles and responsibilities. Engineering assessors have access to professional updating on new equipment in the partner companies.

49. The management of resources is generally satisfactory. There is the a newly refurbished computer suite at the training centre. Alterations have recently taken place to provide access for learners with disabilities. In-Comm Training has a realistic investment programme to provide engineering machinery in the training centre, although there are some gaps in the equipment currently available. Resources for background knowledge training in business administration are inadequate.

50. The management of subcontracted training is weak. In-Comm Training does not check the quality of the training provided by the local further education colleges as part of the engineering programmes. The company does not have service level agreements with all the colleges attended by learners. Where there are agreements, they relate to areas such as health and safety, equal opportunities, punctuality and staff competence. These activities are not checked for compliance, nor is the quality of teaching and learning monitored.

51. The management of the business administration programme is inadequate. Many of the weaknesses found by inspectors had not been identified by managers, and the significance of some weaknesses had been underestimated. In-Comm Training has not planned adequately for the introduction of the new business administration modern apprenticeship framework. Good practice is not shared sufficiently between the two areas of learning. There is insufficient checking of the quality of the provision.

52. Literacy and numeracy support is weak. The company's strategy is that learners need minimum levels of literacy and numeracy before they join the programmes. These vary between programmes. Learners who do not meet the requirements are referred back to Connexions with a clear invitation to reapply at a later date. The company has recently introduced literacy and numeracy assessments for learners. The results of the assessments are not used to shape learners' programmes. Any needs identified are not added to learners' individual learning plans (ILPs). There is no system to check the marking of the assessments and inspectors found errors in the marking. There is no system of support for learners with other identified needs, for example, help with spelling or punctuation.

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade 3

53. In-Comm Training has good initiatives to increase participation by some under-represented groups. The company works closely with the local university on an initiative to involve women learners in engineering training and careers. There are plans to run a similar local programme for girls aged 14 to 16. There are no women on the engineering programmes, although women learners have successfully completed programmes with In-Comm Training in the past.

54. The company has a detailed equal opportunities policy, although it is not always kept fully up to date. The policy includes the regular analysis of data. This is carried out informally. Learners are employed throughout the West Midlands. Three per cent of learners are from minority ethnic communities. This is lower than the proportion in the West Midlands population as a whole, but reflects the proportion in the Aldridge district of Walsall, the location of the company's head office. Most of the learners referred by Connexions are from this area. The company has recently circulated publicity material to the local Asian business group, but so far this has not increased enquiries and recruitment from this group.

55. Learners have a satisfactory awareness of In-Comm Training's appeals and complaints procedures. The company has recently produced a simple and clear leaflet for learners and employers outlining recent equal opportunities legislation. This is displayed on notice boards in the training centre and circulated to learners who do not attend the centre.

56. In 2002-03, In-Comm Training has reviewed its approach to equal opportunities and produced a detailed development plan to improve its performance. Improvements have been made to the premises in response to recent disability legislation. A member of staff has taken over the role of co-ordinator for equal opportunities, which is still being developed, and has recently provided training sessions for all staff. These will also be offered to employers and learners. An audit of employers' equal opportunities policies and procedures has recently started. Some of these initiatives are too recent to have impacted on the experiences of the learners.

57. The promotion of equal opportunities at learners' progress reviews is inadequate. There is no exploration of the range of issues and diverse cultures found in individual workplaces. Learners have only a superficial knowledge of equal opportunities. For most learners the training has been paper-based and consisted of passing on information. There has been no discussion of issues such as what might contribute to discrimination or harassment. Engineering learners who have joined the company in the past month have received a detailed training session.

Quality assurance

Contributory grade 4

58. There are detailed quality assurance procedures which apply both to In-Comm Training and In-Comm Business Services Ltd. However, staff have a limited awareness and understanding of these. The company identified this in January 2003 and is currently re-writing the procedures to make them easier to understand.

59. Sector teams have been established within the past two years to look at core business activities. These include a quality assurance team, a key skills team and an internal verification team. The sector teams meet regularly and meetings are minuted, but issues about the quality of teaching and learning are seldom discussed. There is no clear evidence that the meetings have any impact on the quality of learning.

60. There is insufficient quality assurance of learning. The internal quality assurance audit processes cover the activities of In-Comm Business Services Ltd, but are not applied to In-Comm Training. Training, assessment, internal verification and learning are not audited. There have been some audits of learning reviews in response to particular problems but these were reactive and not part of a planned programme, although the resulting remedial action was effective. In-Comm Training's own team have observed some learning sessions. However, the resulting reports are not sufficiently detailed and concentrate on teaching and the classroom environment. There are no comments on whether learning is taking place.

61. In-Comm Training's quality assurance of subcontractors is weak. The company does not carry out any quality assurance audits of subcontractors. It has procedures for monitoring the quality of off-the-job training by colleges or on-the-job training in work placements, but these are not followed. The company has recognised this weakness and plans to increase the size of the internal audit team.

62. There is no quality assurance of the work of the internal verifiers. There are inconsistencies in approach between the internal verifiers for the two areas of learning. Internal verifiers hold regular standardisation meetings, but where differences of procedure are identified, there is no agreement on a standard method. The need to check the work of the internal verifiers has been identified as a priority by the company's quality assurance representative.

63. The company gathers learners' and employers' feedback through a questionnaire, and the results are analysed. However, the learners' questionnaires ask very superficial questions and do not seek recommendations for improving the programmes. The questionnaire consists mostly of closed questions. There is a space for additional comments, which few learners complete. A new questionnaire has been piloted which requires full, written answers, but it does not include questions on improving the programme. The new questionnaire was sent out in June. The results have yet to be analysed.

64. The company's approach to self-assessment is not yet satisfactory. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process and the development plans are thorough. However, managers are slow to pass on amendments to the staff, for example, key targets for learners' achievement in 2004 were set in June 2003 but will not be shared with the staff until September 2003. The self-assessment report is not sufficiently critical. It contains some of the weaknesses identified by inspectors but omits, or underestimates the significance of others. Inspectors were unable to find evidence for some of the strengths proposed in the report.

AREAS OF LEARNING

Engineering, technology & manufacturing

Grade 3

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	70	3

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- good rate of achievement of additional qualifications
- good practical training
- recent effective key skills training
- good-quality work placements
- effective partnerships to promote engineering

Weaknesses

- low achievement rate for modern apprenticeship frameworks
- weak initial assessment
- poor induction for some learners

Achievement and standards

65. Most learners achieve a wide range of additional qualifications. Health and safety courses are taught by staff from In-Comm Training either at their training centre or on employers' premises. These courses are relevant to the environment in which learners are employed, and include manual handling, abrasive wheels regulations, slinging and lifting, crane safety and environmental health. Courses are arranged for learners at particular employers on quality assurance or machine operation and understanding. All learners who spend the first year in the training centre complete up to three additional units of a level 2 NVQ. Some learners who attend local colleges have completed both craft and higher national qualifications.

66. The achievement rate for modern apprentices is low. Some who started programmes in 1998-99 are still in learning. Between 1998-99 and 1999-2000, 46 advanced modern apprentices (AMAs) were recruited. Of these, 30 per cent have achieved their modern apprenticeship framework and 30 per cent are still in learning. Thirty-four foundation modern apprentices (FMAs) have started programmes since 1999-2000. None has completed the modern apprenticeship framework, but 41 per cent are still in learning. Achievement rates for NVQ learners are satisfactory. Between 1998-99 and 2001-02, 62 per cent of the 39 NVQ learners achieved their qualification. Eight per cent are still in learning.

67. Most learners are producing written and practical work of a very high standard. Portfolios of evidence are well presented, the evidence is diverse and there is good cross-referencing to the NVQ units. Learners are now working well and are on target to achieve on time. They know where they are in the programme and what they must do to achieve. Previous slow progress with key skills qualifications has been resolved, and the quality and standard of work has improved significantly.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	12		18		9		21		25							
Retained*	0		0		0		10	48	18	72						
Successfully completed	0		0		0		3	14	11	44						
Still in learning	10		11		2		10	48	4	16						

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	13		3		9		9									
Retained*	0		0		3	33	8	89								
Successfully completed	0		0		0	0	0	0								
Still in learning	8		3		3	33	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	4		16		3		16									
Retained*	2		9	56	2	67	13	81								
Successfully completed	2		7	44	2	67	13	81								
Still in learning	2		1	6	0	0	0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

68. Learners are given good practical training. They experience a wide range of tasks that develop and enhance their skills. Many learners programme and operate computer-controlled machinery with a minimum of supervision. Training is well planned and supervised by vocationally experienced and well-qualified staff. Learners produce good work that meets industrial standards. Off-the-job training is effectively delivered, individually and in groups. Good use is made of the tutors' experience and of examples linking practical work to background knowledge. Learners demonstrate a good recollection of their previous training. They produce good training and assessment exercises, which in most cases are kept for future reference. Companies and learners value the off-the-job training received during their first year of learning.

69. Recent key skills training has been effective. Learners now begin their key skills training early in the programme. This has not always been the case, and in the past some learners have made slow progress towards achievement of their modern apprenticeship framework. Assessors carry out individual key skills training sessions with learners in the workplace. This high level of personal training motivates learners. Two laptop computers have recently been purchased and are used for IT training in the workplace. The 2002-03 intake of learners has a good understanding of key skills and can see their relevance to the training programme. Key skills are integrated with the on-the-job training, and assessment for key skills qualifications is carried out in the workplace. Evidence of competence is gathered from the workplace. Learners compile comprehensive key skills portfolios, which are of a good standard and well presented. Most learners are now aware of their key skills achievements to date and what they need to do to succeed.

70. Learners have good work placements and are able to gain a wide range of experience in engineering. Employers are involved in complex and demanding engineering processes, such as the manufacture of components for submarines, the automotive industry, specialised machine tooling and the electrical power industry. At work, the wide range of tasks learners carry out enables them to gain all the competences they need to acquire for their NVQ. Most learners are allocated a supervisor or mentor who is vocationally experienced and qualified. One supervisor is a qualified assessor and carries out on-the-job assessments. Many companies have training plans and these are sometimes flexible to meet the needs of the learner and employer. Employers' premises are well equipped, some with state-of-the-art equipment. Learners are encouraged to use this equipment, sometimes working on their own to produce good-quality products. Employers support learners and provide them with additional training.

71. Resources are generally satisfactory. There are new resources at the training centre for computer-aided engineering, but the learners' machines are not networked to the tutor's computer. Resources in the machine shop are adequate to meet the basic requirements of the level 2 NVQ programme. There are insufficient milling machines of a reasonable standard for the numbers of learners in training. Resources in the workplace are good.

72. Assessment is satisfactory, both on- and off-the-job. Assessments are carried out continuously at the training centre, and an assessor visits the workplace every four weeks. Assessment techniques have improved, and so has learners' progress towards the completion of their modern apprenticeship frameworks. Learners' portfolios contain a wide range of evidence. Internal verification is satisfactory, but there is no overall plan to ensure that all learners are identified and available for sampling.

73. Pastoral support for learners is satisfactory. Assessors and training officers frequently visit learners in the workplace. Learners' progress is reviewed every 12 weeks. Training staff also make informal visits and learners are encouraged to contact them for assistance when required. Most employers are supportive of training and allow modern apprentices to attend a local college of further education to gain the background knowledge needed for their NVQ. Learners receive good individual support and there are rapid responses to problems encountered.

74. There is weak initial assessment of learners' needs. Learners' literacy, numeracy and key skills are assessed, and care is taken to select appropriate NVQ units with employers. The results of the literacy and numeracy tests are not always transferred accurately to ILPs. Learners who achieve poor results are not followed up. There is little planning to ensure that learners will have the literacy and numeracy support they need. Few learners have been identified as requiring additional support and there is little evidence of support being provided.

75. The induction programme for some learners is poor. In-Comm Training has recognised this and the induction process has been improved. New learners receive a comprehensive five-day induction in the training centre. Learners who go directly into a workplace receive an induction that varies widely and is poor. It is brief, lasting only half an hour in some cases, superficial and ineffective. Some learners have been in the workplace for up to six months before the induction is carried out. In some cases, induction booklets are issued for learners to digest with little help from staff. Most learners had a poor recollection of the induction process and its content.

Leadership and management

76. In-Comm Training has effective partnerships to promote engineering. Significant efforts have been made to develop partnerships with other providers in order to encourage employers to raise standards in engineering and promote clearer progression routes for learners. Partnerships with local schools are particularly effective in encouraging young people to pursue a career in engineering. In-Comm Training is involved in providing a student modern apprenticeship (SMA) scheme in partnership with four local schools. Following the 2002 programme, 50 per cent of SMAs joined work-based learning programmes when they left school.

77. There is a clear management structure in engineering. Staff meetings are held every week. Internal communications have recently improved. Some learners are confused about the roles of staff who carry out reviews and assessment. There is close monitoring

of NVQ learners' performance, and any issues identified for action are dealt with promptly.

78. All learners receive a copy of In-Comm Training's equal opportunities policy and the supporting handbooks. Equal opportunities is covered well during the induction for learners based in the training centre, but not adequately reinforced through the review process.

Business administration, management & professional**Grade 4**

Programmes inspected	Number of learners	Contributory grade
Work-based learning for young people	33	4

The following strengths and weaknesses were identified during this inspection:

Strengths

- supportive employers
- good matching of the programme to learners' and employers' needs

Weaknesses

- poor achievement rates
- no background knowledge training for business administration learners
- little use of resources to support learning
- uncorrected errors in spelling and grammar in learners' portfolios
- ineffective support arrangements for learners
- poor response to the challenge of the new modern apprenticeship framework

Achievement and standards

79. Very few learners have achieved their qualifications. Of the 22 AMAs who started their qualification between 1997-98 and 2000-01, only three completed the full modern apprenticeship framework. Of the 47 FMAs who started modern apprenticeship programmes between 1998-99 and 2000-02, only four have achieved their qualification, although seven are still in learning. In 1998-99, 47 per cent of the 19 NVQ-only learners achieved their qualification. Since then, there have only been four new learners, and three of them have left without completing their NVQ. In-Comm Training has taken steps to improve the achievement rate.

80. The retention rate is showing signs of improvement. Between 1997-98 and 2000-01 an average of 36 per cent of AMAs, 64 per cent of FMAs and 52 per cent of NVQ learners were retained for the planned duration of their programme. All 10 AMAs who started programmes this year and 15 of the 20 FMAs are still in learning.

81. Learners' work is generally well developed and clearly presented. Learners are proud of the work in their portfolios, and clear about how it meets the standards required. They are aware of the new skills they are developing, including the time management and prioritisation skills required to get their NVQ work done. Some learners who already have a level 2, or in some cases level 3, qualification do not find the FMA very stimulating, but wish to complete it before progressing to something more demanding.

The following tables show the achievement and retention rates available up to the time of the inspection.

LSC funded work-based learning																
Advanced modern apprenticeships (AMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99		1997-98					
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	10				2		3		6		11					
Retained*	0				1	50	1	33	1	17	5	45				
Successfully completed	0				1	50	0	0	0	0	2	18				
Still in learning	10				0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0				

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
Foundation modern apprenticeships (FMA)																
	2002-03		2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99							
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	20		11		18		14		4							
Retained*	0		8	73	9	50	11	79	2	50						
Successfully completed	0		0	0	2	11	2	14	0	0						
Still in learning	15		6	55	1	6	0	0	0	0						

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

LSC funded work-based learning																
NVQ Training																
	2001-02		2000-01		1999-2000		1998-99									
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Number of starts	2		2				19									
Retained*	1		0	0			11	58								
Successfully completed	0		0	0			9	47								
Still in learning	1		0	0			0	0								

*retained learners are those who have stayed in learning for at least the planned duration of their training programmes, or have successfully completed their programme within the time allowed

Quality of education and training

82. In-Comm Training has developed excellent relationships with employers. Employers who are members of group training associations expect to contribute time and effort to support their young learners. Supervisors are keen to be involved in their learners' programmes and are often willing to disrupt work routines to ensure that learners gain the specific experience they need for their qualifications. Many of the supervisors have a good, detailed understanding of the requirements of the NVQ. One is acting as a work-based assessor, which is very unusual in business administration. Several employers offer

college courses to complement the modern apprenticeship, or as a future progression route for the learners. These include professional personnel and development training, book-keeping, and commercial information and communications technology (ICT) courses. In-Comm Training offers half-day health and safety and first aid training courses.

83. The company uses the full range of options available within the administration NVQ to make sure that the learning programmes match the learners' job roles. Employers appreciate that if they want to change what their learner does at work, it is usually possible to find an NVQ unit to match the new requirements. Learners value the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing at work, and to demonstrate their competence.

84. There is no programme of off-the-job training to prepare learners for the NVQ, key skills, or new framework requirements. Learners receive individual coaching from their assessor to help them prepare for assessments, but there has been no attempt so far to teach learners the skills and background knowledge associated with administration. Learners can come to the training centre by invitation to work on any area they might be struggling with, but this is an exception. They also have the opportunity to take generic courses such as telephone techniques which might be running at the training centre. ILPs state that learners do not need any training to prepare them for assessment for the NVQ, although some are identified as having additional learning needs in key skills. There are no timetabled key skills sessions, but learners can have individual coaching from their assessor by arrangement. In-Comm Training relies on employers to train learners in the skills required in the workplace, and then assesses them. Most of the learners on the new modern apprenticeship framework, which came into operation seven months before the inspection, have been given the induction workbook which is an essential part of the framework. There is no training to help the learners complete the workbook, apart from the information provided during induction and in the learners' handbook. Learners have not been given any guidance as to where they might find the information they need. There are plans to offer a 10-week rolling programme of training to support the technical certificate and the NVQ itself. A schedule of sessions has been drawn up, but no scheme of work, learning materials, or lesson plans have been prepared.

85. There are no resources specifically for the administration programme. Learners do not have any handouts or textbooks, although there is a wide range of videos in the training centre on management topics, which learners can borrow. The trainer/assessor has materials on her laptop computer to help learners with key skills, and to update information about employment legislation, but these are not generally used. Learners have to express or demonstrate a need before receiving any training. Assessors and verifiers hold relevant qualifications. The assessor has recently completed a modern apprenticeship, and has a good understanding of the difficulties learners face.

86. Assessment for the NVQ and key skills is well planned and methodical. However, some learners' portfolios contain pieces of work with uncorrected errors in spelling and grammar. Some of this work has also been sampled for internal verification, and no comments have been made. Most of the spelling errors would not be picked up by spell

checkers in word processing programmes. Grammatical errors include a complete failure to punctuate, and incorrect and inconsistent uses of the apostrophe and to capitalisation. The external verifier has commented on the poor spelling and grammar in portfolios and the failure to correct it. This was discussed in an internal verification meeting some months ago, but effective action has not been taken.

87. The arrangements for identifying and supporting learners with additional needs are ineffective. Most learners are given an initial assessment to ascertain their level of key skills. The results of this assessment are usually summarised on their ILP. Some assessments do not appear to have been marked. Some learners also take a basic skills screening test. The results of this are not always shared with the learner or recorded on the ILP. National literacy and numeracy tests have just been introduced, and some learners have taken these. Where learning needs are indicated, for example for numeracy, they are recorded on the ILP, but there is no reference to how they will be met. Some learners' files include interview notes. There is no assessment of learners' aptitude for an administration NVQ. A few learners have completed a form indicating what they can already do, to ensure that their prior learning can be accredited. However, there is no attempt to assess learners' prior learning. None of the business administration assessors is qualified to assess and accredit prior learning.

88. Some ILPs do not make clear which version of the administration framework learners are working towards. None of the ILPs seen by inspectors referred to training for the NVQ or any of the other elements of the new framework.

89. Learners' progress reviews take place in the workplace every three months, as required by the LSC's contract. Most reviews are carried out by the assessor, but in some cases, one of In-Comm Training's business advisers carries out the pastoral reviews. The ILPs are often inaccurate, and are not generally referred to in the review process. Employers are involved in assessment planning, but they have little to do with the review process, although they are invited to add a comment to the review document. The self-assessment report identified support for learners as a strength.

Leadership and management

90. In-Comm Training has no strategy for dealing with the challenges imposed by the new modern apprenticeship frameworks. The frameworks require a specified amount of training, leading to an externally assessed technical certificate. They also require learners to complete a detailed and demanding induction workbook, for which they will need either information, or the skills and resources to carry out their own research. The new frameworks have been in place for seven months, but In-Comm Training has not yet developed any materials for learners, or a coherent approach to supporting learners' own research. The new requirements have been discussed in one sector team meeting, but have not been mentioned since. There has been no attempt to work collaboratively with other providers to develop an approach to the problem, or to look for good practice in other providers. There has been no sense of urgency in making arrangements, even though it is a requirement of the framework that the induction workbook should be completed within six months of the learner starting on the

programme. Half the AMAs are with one employer, with an inexperienced work-based assessor. There has been no attempt to support this assessor in meeting the framework requirements, and the modern apprentices and their assessor were not aware that they had to complete induction workbooks.

91. Internal verification is carried out according to a sampling plan. Each portfolio is internally verified at least twice, and generally three times, during its development. The management information system is used to identify when a portfolio is due for internal verification. Feedback to the assessor is not usually included in the learner's portfolio, for reasons of confidentiality. Internal verification has not identified the problem of uncorrected work in portfolios, even though the external verifier commented on it. Internal verification did identify a problem with a previous assessor, which has now been rectified. However, it has not led the development of an approach to assessment for the new elements of the framework.

92. The self-assessment report identified the two most serious weaknesses of poor achievement and no background knowledge training, but it underestimates their significance. It failed to identify any other weaknesses. It is clear on the value of the support of employers in the workplace, but it also claims other strengths which are not relevant to the training programme or which could not be substantiated by inspection. The report is not sufficiently self-critical, and includes commentary on measures which have not yet been put in place, such as training for the technical certificate.