

IPS International Ltd

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Background information

Inspection judgements

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

Key for inspection grades

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

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

Scope of the inspection

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

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

- Health and social care
- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. IPS International Limited (IPS) is a privately owned training and consultancy business. Originally part of Sheerness Steel, IPS became a limited company in 1997 and was bought by three senior managers in February 2000. The head office and main training facilities are on a large industrial estate close to Rochester. The care provision is delivered from a smaller training centre in Dover.
2. IPS has a contract with Kent and Medway LSC to offer training to apprentices, advanced apprentices and NVQs for adult learners in health and social care, engineering and manufacturing technologies, information and communication technology (ICT), customer services and business administration. IPS is a Centre of Vocational Excellence for advanced maintenance engineering. All initial engineering training and most technical certificates for engineering are delivered in the training centre in Rochester. Some training for business administration and care learners is delivered in the training centres in Rochester and Dover. All other training and assessment is delivered in the workplace. IPS is a lead contract holder for Train to Gain programmes in the South East region.
3. IPS provides a small young apprenticeship programme in motor vehicle engineering to local schools and operates as a subcontractor to another provider to deliver the first year off-the-job training to advanced apprentices in engineering. The Train to Gain programmes in manufacturing are subcontracted to specialist training providers. The company provides commercial training programmes that account for 50% of the business.
4. At the time of the inspection there were 220 learners in care, 280 in engineering, 30 in ICT and 25 in business, administration and law. ICT and business, administration and law were not inspected.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

Health and social care	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. All aspects of the common inspection framework including achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management are satisfactory. Equality of opportunity and social inclusion are also satisfactory. The overall success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices have been low and improved in 2006/07. The quality of provision in engineering and health and social care are satisfactory. Management of training is good. The quality improvement arrangements and use of management information are not well developed. The management of subcontractors is unsatisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. IPS has demonstrated that it has satisfactory capacity to improve and has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The framework completion rates in business administration have improved to above the national average. IPS has continued to develop the provision in care following a reinspection in April 2005. The success rates are improving and are now high for apprentices and the NVQ part of the advanced apprenticeship framework. The overall success rate in engineering have been low but have started to improve in 2006/07 with fewer learners leaving their programmes early. The engineering provision has also improved and technical certificate training is now delivered in the training centre. However, IPS has been slow in addressing some of the weaknesses found at the previous inspection and the grade for engineering is lower than the grade awarded in February 2004.
7. The self-assessment process is inadequate. The process is inclusive with full involvement from staff and learners' and employers' views sought through an annual questionnaire, however, the self-assessment report was not sufficiently self-critical and did not identify many of the areas for improvement found during inspection. Some of the grades in the self-assessment report are higher than those given by inspectors. The range of evidence used to support the judgements was not sufficiently broad and insufficient focus was given to the qualification success rates and the performance of different groups of learners.

Key strengths

- High success rates on most Train to Gain programmes

- Good partnership working and involvement of employers
- Good management of training
- Effective use and development of resources

Key areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates on apprenticeship programmes
- Analysis of management information
- Implementation and evaluation of improvements
- Promotion and implementation of equality impact assessments
- Accuracy of the self-assessment process

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. Learners grow in confidence and ability during their programmes and develop good vocational and personal skills. The standard of learners' work is good and many advanced apprentices in engineering achieve additional qualifications which are at a higher level than that required by the framework. Advanced apprentices in engineering develop good social and workplace skills through a well structured personal development programme.
9. Achievement and standards for adult learners on Train to Gain are good. Success rates are high in engineering and care, and build on the success of previous programmes for adult learners. The number of learners on business administration and ICT programmes remains small and the success rates are low.
10. Overall achievement and standards in work-based learning is satisfactory. Framework success rates in business administration are consistently high. Success rates for apprentices in care have improved significantly in 2006/07. Framework success rates for advanced apprentices in engineering and care are improving but remain low.
11. Timely success rates are low and too many learners complete their frameworks a long time after their expected end dates. Key skills are often delivered late in the programme. Effective action has been taken to ensure that care learners complete key skills early but insufficient action has been taken in engineering. IPS does not analyse data to monitor the performance or trends of different groups of learners.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. Teaching and learning are well planned and carefully managed to meet the needs and interests of learners and employers. Training staff are knowledgeable and experienced. IPS has developed good materials for the delivery of the engineering technical certificate. Care trainers make effective use of good quality text books and resources. Administration staff have access to suitable materials and laptop computers when required. The links between training session, the technical certificates and the NVQ are clear.
13. Initial assessment is satisfactory and most learners with language, literacy and numeracy learning needs receive adequate support. Some Train to Gain learners in manufacturing have not received any additional support for literacy needs. Assessments are good in care and satisfactory in engineering. Generally internal verification is sound. However, it failed to identify weak assessment practice by a subcontractor.
14. Progress reviews are regular and frequent with full involvement of employers. Appropriate and specific actions are set in business administration and care, however, some of the actions set for engineering learners are too general and appear on consecutive reviews. Targets are not set for the expected completion of different parts of the framework.

15. IPS is involved with a number of projects to widen participation and encourage women into engineering. Effective partnership arrangements are in place with local schools, further education colleges, other training providers and employers. The range of provision in engineering is increasing with the introduction of motor vehicle, and a young apprenticeship programme. Two of the young apprentices are female. A mobile training unit is used to train learners at employers' premises and to provide taster sessions to schools. IPS is responsive to the needs of employers and offers a broad range of programmes. Staff schedule visits and training at times to meet employers' and learners' needs.
16. Learners and employers receive adequate information, advice and guidance on the programmes. Learners are aware of the wide range of opportunities for progression in their occupational areas. Employers encourage and support learners throughout the programmes.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

17. Training is well managed. IPS directors operate a flat management structure and responsibility and autonomy is effectively devolved to managers and staff. Communications are effective. Regular senior management meetings effectively monitor learners who are at risk of not completing their programmes. Managers and directors agree annual targets in line with the business plan. The business plan also links to the appraisal system.
18. IPS has developed good training resources for care programmes and the advanced apprenticeship technical certificate in engineering. Training materials are of a good quality and are effectively used. Staff are well qualified, occupational experienced and have access to a wide range of training to enhance their occupational and professional skills. Some staff are involved in commercial projects locally and internationally which develop good industry practice and knowledge which they share with learners. All staff have recently completed training to raise awareness of the barriers faced by people with disabilities.
19. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. IPS has policies and procedures to cover disability, race, gender and age but there is no overarching strategy to promote equality. IPS monitors the number of learners in each sector subject area. The proportion of males in care is above average but the wide range of initiatives to encourage more women into engineering has not had an impact. IPS has not yet carried out equality impact assessments on its functions and procedures to ensure fulfilment of general duties. Promotion of equality and diversity leads only to a basic awareness among learners. IPS checks employers have equal opportunities policies, however, this is not actively promoted.
20. Management information is not used sufficiently to analyse the performance of different groups of learners and identify trends. Managers have not set targets or developed specific actions to address the late key skills achievement of advanced apprentices in engineering.

Management has focused on improving overall framework success rates but have not yet taken action to improve the timeliness of framework completions.

21. IPS does not evaluate the actions taken to bring about improvements. Some of the arrangements for quality improvement are not sufficiently well implemented. There are some examples where good practice has been shared among staff, however, learning session observation notes comment on the teaching methods and not the effectiveness of learning. The internal verification systems are generally sound but the weak assessment practices used by one subcontractor in manufacturing have not been addressed.

What learners like:

- 'Get lots of help'
- 'The team-building activities'
- 'You can just ring – they are always there to help'
- 'Good helpful relationships with other workers and apprentices'
- 'Developing my understanding'
- 'Explaining things well'
- 'Good at delivering units in a way you can understand'

What learners think could improve:

- 'Can't think of anything'
- 'More practical work and assessors to see you'
- 'NVQ questions are repetitive without reason'
- 'Difficult to get to Dover'

Sector subject areas

Health and social care

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

22. There are 220 learners in total, made up of 37 advanced apprentices, 50 apprentices and 133 Train to Gain learners. All learners are employed and work in a wide variety of adult care settings including residential care homes and domiciliary care services. Learners receive off-the-job training at their place of work or at one of IPS' training centres.

Strengths

- High success rates for Train to Gain and apprenticeships
- Effective integrated approach to training with employers
- Good support and resources for learners

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates for advanced apprentices
- Low timely achievement
- Analysis of management information

Achievement and standards

23. Overall achievement and standards are satisfactory. Success rates for Train to Gain learners are high at 84% in 2006/07. This is an improvement on the success rates achieved on the Employer Training Pilot programmes.
24. IPS has restructured and redesigned the way it delivers apprenticeship frameworks to improve success rates. This has been effective for apprentices and data suggests improvements are now starting to show in advanced apprenticeships. Overall framework success rates for apprentices improved from 14% in 2004/05 to 64% in 2006/07. Success rates for advanced apprentices are improving but remain low at 29% in 2006/07. Most advanced apprentices complete the NVQ level 3.
25. The standard of learners work is good. Achievement by learners and employers is formally recognised by IPS through learner and employer of the month awards. These awards are valued by employers and learners.
26. Timely success rates for all learners have improved but remain low. In 2004/05 the rate was 4% and in 2006/07 the rate was around 20% for Train to Gain learners, advanced apprentices and apprentices.

Quality of provision

27. Training is good. It is well planned and engages the interest of learners. Tutors deliver training to small groups, enabling them to meet the needs of individual learners. All learners are provided with a personal copy of a good quality text book specifically designed to assist them in achieving their care NVQ. IPS also provides a “Red Resource Box” for each employer site which contains a wide range of authoritative information on care related topics from professional sources. Learners make frequent and effective use of the resource and add information to it to assist other learners. Employers are very satisfied with the standard of training delivered by IPS and one employer is planning to use IPS to deliver training to their learners throughout Kent.
28. Assessments are thorough and well planned. Assessors analyse learners’ assignments accurately and identify in detail any additional evidence that is required. Learners receive clear feedback to enable them to improve their written work and professional practice. Assessors use an appropriate range of assessment methods which are adapted to match learners’ individual needs. Initial and key skills assessment is satisfactory and staff review learners who may need additional support on a monthly basis and agree how learners can best be supported. IPS works with employers to ensure that appropriate support is available during training and in the workplace. Additional support is provided by a key skills tutor.
29. Assessors carry out frequent reviews of learners’ progress. The quality of progress reviews, target setting and individual plans are satisfactory. Progress reviews are effective in setting short-term targets but are less effective in setting medium- and long-term targets for apprentices and advanced apprentices.
30. Working relationships with employers are good. IPS uses employers’ staff as work-based assessors to make the most of assessment opportunities in the workplace. IPS encourages work based assessors to train in key skills and internal verification to enhance the support provided to learners. Regular meetings promote the effective sharing of good professional and assessment practices. IPS staff attend employer in-house training events to develop and maintain their professional competence and to ensure the training delivered by employers is integrated with the programme. Employers value the flexibility of assessors who mirror learners’ shift patterns and undertake assessments at weekends and nights.
31. Support for learners is good. IPS provides employers with information about learners’ progress that enables them to maintain up to date records of achievement. IPS and employers work closely together to resolve issues that may affect the progress of learners. Learners who have difficulty returning to learning are treated with consideration and respect and are given effective support to make progress. Learners feel confident in being able to request support from staff by telephone and in the workplace where appropriate.

Leadership and management

32. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Managers have a good understanding of the needs and progress of individual learners. Staff development is well planned to meet both individual and team needs. Staff hold relevant professional qualifications, maintain their professional competence and some hold teaching qualifications.

33. IPS recognised that the success rates for apprentices and advanced apprentices in 2004/05 and 2005/06 were low and took effective action to implement significant changes to improve the quality of delivery, particularly in relation to key skills and NVQ assessment. Managers and staff have worked hard to improve success rates but have not yet focused on improving timely success. This is also not part of their 2007/08 action plan.
34. The self-assessment process was inclusive and the report identified some of the strengths and areas for improvement. The promotion of equality of opportunity is satisfactory.
35. Analysis of management information is insufficient. Managers do not use management information to inform their understanding of the needs and success rates of different groups of learners. Nor do they analyse information to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of changes they make to the programme. Management information systems are not used well enough to monitor the quality of the training programmes and to identify where further improvements are required.

Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Context

36. Currently 155 advanced apprentices, 46 apprentices, 22 young apprentices and 57 Train to Gain learners are on programmes including engineering maintenance and motor vehicle. Most of the Train to Gain learners are on glazing or fenestration qualifications delivered by a specialist subcontractor. The first year of training for advanced apprentices is delivered in the training centre. A few apprentices complete their technical certificate at a local college and all other training and assessment is in the workplace.

Strengths

- Good progression to higher levels
- High success rates on Train to Gain in manufacturing
- Good acquisition of social and workplace skills for advanced apprentices
- Good delivery of off-the-job training
- Effective response to local needs

Areas for improvement

- Low success rates on apprentice programmes
- Late completion of frameworks
- Setting and achieving of specific and measurable targets
- Management of subcontractors
- Promotion and development of equality of opportunity

Achievement and standards

37. Overall achievement and standards are satisfactory. Progression is good with many advanced apprentices completing a higher national certificate in addition to the requirements of their framework. The standard of learners' work is good and they quickly acquire appropriate workplace skills to work alongside more experienced colleagues. In 2006/07, the success rate for Train to Gain learners on the fenestration installation and survey programme was high at 95%.

38. Advanced engineering apprentices acquire good social and workplace skills involving a series of events including outdoor activities during their first year. Groups are carefully selected to ensure learners with different personality types are challenged to work effectively in teams. The experience is used to provide evidence for their skills and is highly valued by learners who recognise the benefits.

39. The overall framework success rate for advanced apprentices is low at 39% in 2004/05 and 31% in 2005/06. At period 12 in 2006/07, the rate had improved to 48% and there are indications that the final success rates may be higher. The number of learners leaving the programme early has reduced. The overall framework success rates for apprentices are low with two out of ten apprentices completing. The performance of different groups of learners is not analysed.

40. Many advanced apprentices complete their frameworks a long time after their planned end date. In several cases, this is two years later than planned. The timely success rates remain low at 10% in 2005/06 and 13% in 2006/07. Many learners do not complete all their key skills until near the end of their programme. This issue was not recognised in the self-assessment report and insufficient action has been taken to address this.

Quality of provision

41. The quality of provision is satisfactory. In 2006, IPS started delivering technical certificates for advanced apprentices in the training centre. The course delivery is good and a flexible approach to tutorials is effective. The pass rate for first year apprentices is 87% with some learners who failed re-sitting their tests. Effective links are made between the technical certificate and the performing engineering operations NVQ at Level 2. Off-the-job training is well structured and delivered by well qualified and experienced staff. Resources are adequate.
42. Assessment and internal verification in most areas is sound and sufficiently resourced. However, the timeliness of assessment by observation is not managed effectively. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners complete diagnostic screening tests to identify any additional learning needs and assessors also identify needs through their regular contact. Support is provided although this is not always recorded. Appropriate action is taken to support learners with disabilities. Train to Gain learners do not receive sufficient support for identified language, literacy or numeracy needs.
43. Progress reviews are satisfactory. These are held monthly and appropriate time is spent with learners and employers. Short-term actions are set and usually checked at the next visit but no target dates are set for actions that may take longer than a month. Some actions appear on consecutive reviews and sometimes for many months. No targets are set for individual components of the framework. There is an expectation that key skills will be completed in the first year, however, learners and employers are not aware of this.
44. IPS is responsive to local needs and good partnership working has been developed. The young apprentice programme has been developed to meet the needs of local schools and the motor vehicle programmes to meet the interests of young people. Working relationships with employers are good and assessors plan visits to suit the shift patterns of learners. IPS responded quickly to take over assessment from one company who previously had in-house assessors.
45. The quality of information, advice and guidance provided to learners and employers is satisfactory. In many cases there is a long standing and effective relationship with employers. Some employers regularly visit learners during their first year at the training centre.

Leadership and management

46. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Management of off-the-job training is good with well structured and carefully planned training. Learners rotate around different sections of the workshops to develop the basic electrical and or mechanical skills needed

by their employers. IPS is highly regarded by industry for their commercial course provision.

47. Quality assurance arrangements are satisfactory. The review of the technical certificate courses was thorough and detailed but audits and monitoring arrangements do not always identify the inconsistencies in the completion of documentation. The self-assessment was also not sufficiently critical.
48. Management of subcontractors is unsatisfactory. Communications are not structured well enough to ensure the progress of learners is effectively monitored. Internal verifications failed to identify the weak assessment practices used by a subcontracted assessor. Insufficient feedback is collected from Train to Gain learners who are on subcontracted provision.
49. Promotion and development of equality of opportunity is insufficient. Learners are provided with considerable paperwork at induction, but are engaged in few activities to explore various issues. The equal opportunities policy is also out of date. Learners' awareness and understanding of the topic is insufficient. At reviews, learners are asked closed questions and there is little attempt to check or develop understanding. IPS helps employers develop equal opportunity policies when needed, but there is not enough evidence of systematic monitoring of employers' policies.

Annex

Learners' achievements

Overall success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by IPS International 2004 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/c college NVQ rate**	National NVQ rate**	Provider/college framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	77	49%	48%	30%	34%
		timely	79	30%	31%	19%	22%
	05-06	overall	84	38%	53%	27%	44%
		timely	104	16%	34%	10%	28%
	06-07	overall	51	69%	N/a	41%	N/a
		timely	44	39%	N/a	16%	N/a
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	62	60%	51%	34%	39%
		timely	56	18%	29%	7%	22%
	05-06	overall	58	52%	58%	33%	52%
		timely	56	7%	38%	4%	34%
	06-07	overall	48	73%	N/a	63%	N/a
		timely	45	24%	N/a	20%	N/a

Note 'At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006/07 had yet to be fully validated'

- * Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
- ** College/provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain programmes** managed by IPS International 2006 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider/college NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006/07	overall	132	92
		timely	177	64
	2007/08 (4 months)	overall	95	62
		timely		

Note: 2007/08 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first three months or greater of the LSC contract year

- * Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned
- ** College/provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'
- *** Includes Train to Gain long course NVQ provision, but not skills for life