

Consulting Principles Limited

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Background information

Inspection judgements

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

Key for inspection grades

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

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

Scope of the inspection

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

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

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. Consulting Principles Limited (Consulting Principles) was established as a consultancy in 1987 and has its head office in Wolverhampton, in the West Midlands. The company works with a range of industrial and service sector companies including multi-nationals and small employers with less than 20 staff.
2. Consulting Principles set up a NVQ centre in 2007 to deliver qualifications to companies operating in the manufacturing sector. The provider has received Train to Gain funding from the Birmingham and Solihull LSC since April 2007; this work now forms 80% of the company's business.
3. The Train to Gain programme has an internal verifier and 10 assessors, and is managed by two company directors. Over 160 learners have completed since the programme began. A further 152 are currently in learning and following a range of Level 2 engineering and manufacturing technologies NVQs. Seventy-six learners are taking a NVQ in performing manufacturing operations, 27 are on metal processing and allied operations, 21 on distribution, warehousing and storage, 21 on chemical, pharmaceutical and petrochemical operations and seven on business improvement techniques.
4. All learners are employed in manufacturing establishments in the Midlands. One hundred and sixteen learners are male, 36 are female, 94 are White and 58 are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
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Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technology	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates are very high for learners who completed in 2007/08. However, timely success rates are low.
6. The quality of provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies is satisfactory. Assessment practice is good. Classroom teaching is satisfactory and employers generally offer good support for training, but the identification of additional learning needs and provision of additional learning support are ineffective. Programmes are well matched to learners' and employers' needs. Guidance and support is satisfactory. However, while assessors provide high levels of individual support as part of the NVQ process, initial advice and guidance is underdeveloped.
7. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The company's clear strategic focus makes good use of senior managers' expertise in the regional manufacturing sector. Assessors are well qualified and experienced. Communication with employers is good. The focus on health and safety throughout the programme is good. The management of training is insufficiently developed.
8. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. The company has an appropriate and up-to-date policy and has good links with local minority ethnic businesses. However, equality of opportunity is insufficiently promoted.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. Consulting Principles has a satisfactory capacity to improve. This is the company's first inspection. The company's first self-assessment is broadly accurate and identifies many of the strengths and areas for improvement that inspectors found. Self-assessment grades were similar to those of inspectors. However, key stakeholders were not sufficiently consulted during the self-assessment process. Some aspects of the company's quality improvement arrangements are not formalised sufficiently. The action plan to address areas for improvement identified in the report usefully highlights improvements made in the past year. Overall success rates are high. The company now has plans to address the low timely success rates.

Key strengths

- Very high success rates
- Good assessment practice

- Well matched programmes to meet employer and learner needs
- Clear strategic focus

Key areas for improvement

- Low timely success rates
- Ineffective skills for life assessment and support
- Insufficiently developed management of training
- Insufficient promotion of equality of opportunity

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

10. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates for Train to Gain learners are very high at 96% for learners who completed in 2007/08. However, timely success rates are low. Only 32% of learners with a planned end date in 2007/08 achieved within time. This is not acknowledged in the self-assessment report. Data does not suggest any significant differences between the overall or timely success rates of different groups.
11. Learners are committed to, and enthusiastic about, their training programme. They gain confidence in dealing with others and improve their understanding of their role in the workplace. Many learners have not participated in formal study since leaving school. The programmes provide many with their first qualification opportunity. The standard of learners' portfolios is good. They are comprehensively indexed, well organised and contain a wide range of evidence. Good health and safety practice is reinforced throughout the NVQ programme.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

12. The quality of provision is satisfactory overall. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Assessment practice is good. Assessors are appropriately qualified with a wide range of relevant industrial experience. Some assessors are based on employers' premises and others make frequent visits to the workplace. Regular opportunities for assessment and frequent contact between learners and assessors are provided. A good variety of assessment methods are used, including observations, questioning, witness testimonies and photographic evidence. On-the-job workstations are routinely used for assessments while learners carry out their work activities. Assessment observations are well planned and thoroughly recorded. Assessors give clear written and verbal feedback after observations and unit completion to enable learners to improve their competencies. Progress reviews take place on completion of assessments. Reviews are not sufficiently used to monitor progress on the NVQ. Their focus is on identifying and agreeing the next opportunity for assessment.
13. Classroom teaching is satisfactory. However, learning materials are not differentiated sufficiently for the range of learners' abilities. Employers generally offer good support for training although some have difficulty in releasing staff.
14. The identification of additional learning needs and provision of additional learning support are ineffective. Learners complete a simple self-analysis of their information technology, literacy and numeracy skills on recruitment to the programme, but this information is not analysed or used sufficiently. Assessors offer informal, on site, support to those who request it. However, this does not meet the needs of those learners whose literacy and language skills are weak. Assessors are not qualified to diagnose specific support needs or to effectively structure the additional learning support required.
15. Programmes are well matched to learners' and employers' needs. The range of NVQs available meets the needs of employers and their staff. At the programme planning stage, employers are able to influence the qualifications offered and the method of delivery. At the recruitment stage, learners have a choice of optional units to match their work situations. For example, on the business improvement techniques NVQ, learners have to choose an improvement project that focuses on a real-work problem and is agreed with

their employer. A range of additional training, including forklift truck driving, risk assessment, manual handling and health and safety, significantly broaden the learners' preparation for industry. Learners' employability and transferability between departments and within teams is greatly enhanced by the additional training received while completing the NVQ. Employer relationships are good. This is recognised as a strength in the self-assessment report.

16. Guidance and support are satisfactory. Assessors provide substantial one to one support throughout the assessment process. However, initial advice and guidance is underdeveloped. Assessors interview all learners who are nominated by their employer for participation on the Train to Gain programme but the amount and quality of advice given is limited. The short induction programme does not adequately cover all the necessary items identified for induction. Consulting Principles staff do not have any specialist qualifications in guidance and support.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

17. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Consulting Principles has a clear strategic focus, which makes good use of senior managers' expertise in, and knowledge of, the regional manufacturing sector. The company uses its expertise in consultancy well. Free consultancy is offered to complement the NVQ programmes provided to companies. The company has productive links with regional networks such as the national skills academy for manufacturing. Communication with employers is good.

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18. Health and safety is constantly reinforced and developed throughout training programmes. Learners have a good awareness of expected health and safety practices on their employer's premises. The safeguarding procedures meet current government requirements. Training resources at employer premises are good. Most locations have good off-the-job training facilities.
19. The calibre of assessors is good. They possess good experience within the sector and are well qualified academically. Two of the assessors currently employed have teaching qualifications, and two are working towards a teaching qualification. The company is aware of the need to develop an appropriate appraisal system. Assessors have informal individual meetings with managers, but these are not formally linked to staff development and training.
20. The self-assessment report, produced by the company specifically for the inspection, was mainly written by one of the directors. Assessors, employers and other stakeholders had little input. It is broadly accurate and contains a useful action plan that is adequately specific and measurable. Internal verification is satisfactory. The company has made recent changes to the management of internal verification, but it is too early to judge the impact of these. The company acknowledges the need to increase the number of internal verifiers to match the growth in learner numbers.
21. The management of training is insufficiently developed. The company generates useful information on learners but this is not sufficiently collated and analysed to inform management decisions. For example, an information, advice and guidance feedback form is used at the beginning, middle and end of a programme, but the information is not collated or analysed. Similarly available data on learner achievement is not analysed by gender or ethnicity. Monitoring systems and software to monitor progress are not always dated to allow the monitoring of timely progress. The flow of management information to assessors is limited. Some aspects of the company's quality improvement arrangements are not formalised sufficiently. For instance the company invites comments from employers, but has no formal system for obtaining employers' and learners' evaluation of the programme. While assessment and reviews are observed by the internal verifier, there is no comparable system of observation of the background knowledge sessions.
22. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. The company has an appropriate policy which refers to recent legislation and has good links with local minority ethnic businesses. Thirty-eight per cent of learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 24% are women. Equality of opportunity is not sufficiently promoted. It is touched on, but not sufficiently developed, during the induction and the programme. The company have not yet provided training in equality and diversity for staff.

What learners like:

- The friendly supportive assessors
- Learning about other sections of the company
- 'Seeing the assessor on site with us'
- Getting properly qualified
- 'The NVQ is fitted in with our work'
- The informal approach – not a teacher/ pupil situation
- Being helped with the questions

What learners think could improve:

- The time it takes to get training
- The NVQ could be done more quickly
- 'The high number of questions we have to answer'

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain** programmes managed by Consulting Principles Ltd **2007 to 2008**

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain	2007/08 (11 months)	overall	82	96
		timely	45	32

* 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

** 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'