

# Inspire to Independence

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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](http://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](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)), reports from the inspectorates' monitoring 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:

- Retail and commercial enterprise
- Business, administration and law

## Description of the provider

1. Inspire to independence (i2i) is a private training provider founded in 2004 and based in York. Initially the company provided New Deal pre-employment provision through a Department for Work and Pensions contract. In July 2007, i2i extended its provision into workforce development. i2i holds five regional LSC contracts to provide Train to Gain at levels 2 and 3 in Yorkshire and Humberside, Greater London, the South West, East Midlands and West Midlands. In 2008/09 learner numbers increased considerably and new contracts were awarded to include the East of England, the North West and North East.
2. i2i offers National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in retail skills, customer service, team leading, warehousing and storage, and business administration. Management skills at level 3 are offered as are adult literacy and numeracy. Currently 1,551 learners are enrolled, of which 344 are following retail and commercial enterprise programmes. Some 1,188 are on business, administration and law provision and 20 learners are following skills for life programmes.
3. At the York head office three senior managers report to one of the four directors with responsibility for workforce development. A team of sales consultants working in different geographical areas make contact with employers and enrol learners. Four programme managers, a skills for life specialist, and 29 assessors support learners through the programme. Most learners are funded at the higher level with training completed on employers' premises.

## Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Inadequate: Grade 4
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Inadequate: Grade 4
Quality of provision	Inadequate: Grade 4
Leadership and management	Inadequate: Grade 4
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

## Sector subject areas

Retail and commercial enterprise	Inadequate: Grade 4
Business, administration and law	Inadequate: Grade 4

## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

Inadequate: Grade 4

4. The effectiveness of the provision is inadequate, as is the provision in retail and commercial enterprise and business, administration and law. Achievement and standards, quality of provision, leadership and management and equality of opportunity are all inadequate.

### Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

5. i2i has demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve. After disappointing first year outcomes for the provision, significant changes have been made to the management structure. Directors have resolved staff shortages effectively in many areas of the business and additional new staff are being recruited. Staff recruitment is more thorough. New staff are supported well and their performance is monitored. The revised senior management team of new and established staff has identified a number of the areas for improvement which were also identified at inspection. They have introduced appropriate new quality improvement arrangements in a very short space of time. However, these have not been in place long enough to bring about significant improvements.
6. The self-assessment process is ineffective. The report overlooks many areas for improvement and strengths are overstated. The process does not include sufficient contributions from staff, learners and employers in evaluating the provision. New managers have identified this area for improvement and have prepared a position statement that gives a much more realistic assessment of the provision.

## Key strengths

- Good and thorough assessment practices
- Clear strategic direction, shared with and understood by staff
- Good induction, mentoring and support for new staff
- Good recent initiatives to improve provision
- Highly effective strategies to establish good employer links

## Key areas for improvement

- The inadequate provision
- Low success rates
- Poor co-ordination and planning of learning
- Insufficient employer involvement to support learning and assessment
- Incomplete quality assurance arrangements

- Inadequate arrangements to support the literacy and numeracy needs of learners on occupational awards
- Insufficient use of management information system to drive quality improvement
- Poor promotion and reinforcement of equal opportunities

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Inadequate: Grade 4

7. Achievement and standards are inadequate. i2i's self-assessment judged this aspect as satisfactory. Overall and timely success rates are low as evidenced by i2i's only full year of data. Success rates are low in business, administration and law, but in retail and commercial enterprise overall success rates show an improving trend in the first five months of 2008/09.
8. Learners' progress towards qualification is slow. Many learners complete after their planned end dates. i2i has recruited a significant number of new assessors to resolve the slow progress made by learners. However, it is too soon to assess the success of this measure and too many learners remain behind target. A small group of learners due to complete in 2007/08 are making little or no progress.
9. Recent strategies to improve progress and achievement include increases in the number of assessors, more thorough monitoring of learners' progress and the introduction of assessor targets. However, these interventions have yet to make a significant impact.
10. Learners increase their confidence levels, take more account of their contribution to their work roles and show improved motivation while on programme. Learners' files and workbooks are of a satisfactory standard.

### Quality of provision

Inadequate: Grade 4

11. The quality of provision is inadequate, as are teaching and learning. i2i over-graded this aspect in the self-assessment report. Assessment practices are very effective, taking good account of learners' working practices to optimise assessment opportunities. Experienced assessors use a range of techniques to validate competence, and internal verification is appropriately thorough.
12. Learning resources are an effective combination of workbooks and assessor devised materials. However, the planning of learning takes insufficient account of initial learner assessments. Some of the resulting individual learning plans are insufficiently challenging. Induction does not prepare learners sufficiently for the NVQ process. Retail and commercial enterprise learners are overly reliant on their assessors to help them identify assessment opportunities. The observation of teaching and learning is incomplete. The recent introduction of observations for all key learning processes have yet to be collated to analyse emerging trends or themes. Employers are insufficiently involved in the planning, scheduling and monitoring of learners' training and assessments.
13. The range of programmes offered by i2i meets the needs of learners and employers adequately. Effective processes signpost employers to other



programmes not provided by i2i. In retail and commercial enterprise the needs of individual learners are not fully considered when planning their NVO programme.

14. Arrangements to provide information, advice and guidance are inadequate. Assessor support effectively helps learners plan a wide range of assessment opportunities. However, i2i has no formal processes to refer or support learners with literacy and numeracy needs. Employers are insufficiently involved in learners' progress reviews and some resulting targets are insufficiently detailed.

## Leadership and management

Inadequate: Grade 4

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

15. The board of directors has a clear vision and well considered strategy to meet local, regional and national funding body training priorities. Staff are well informed of the development plans and clearly understand them. The board has carefully restructured the management team, identified the need for new staff to support expansion and has recently appointed new staff at all levels.
16. i2i has developed and implemented particularly good arrangements for induction, mentoring and support for newly appointed staff. The strong staff mentoring system helps assessors to quickly develop the skills and expertise necessary to provide learners with good assessment and support.
17. Links with employers are particularly good. The well trained sales team engage successfully with employers and generally meet demanding recruitment targets. Good links with other training providers enables i2i to refer employers elsewhere when others are better placed to meet their training needs. i2i is forming some particularly good partnerships with employers. For example, i2i is collaborating with an employer in mapping their in-house training to accredited provision, with i2i staff completing the appropriate assessments.
18. Performance management is broadly satisfactory. Senior managers have recently reviewed and redesigned the appraisal system but appraisals have not yet been completed. Staff development is generally satisfactory. Training is taking place, but i2i has no staff development plan and the impact of training is not evaluated.
19. Communication is satisfactory. Methods of communication have developed as the organisation has grown. Staff meet formally and regularly at local, regional and national levels. Meetings are well recorded and productive. Staff particularly value standardisation meetings for sharing information and good practice in assessment and verification. Directorate meetings focus insufficiently on improving overall and timely success rates and the general quality of provision.
20. Quality assurance and improvement arrangements are ineffective and have not produced satisfactory outcomes for the first year of the provision. Following a

period of rapid expansion, both geographically and in learner numbers, quality assurance and improvement arrangements are not fit for purpose. The new senior management team has identified this and have revised or replaced most of the systems quickly. However, the new arrangements are insufficiently established to bring about significant improvements in the quality of provision.

21. The use of management information systems to evaluate performance and analyse trends is insufficiently thorough. Newly introduced management information reports are insufficiently clear and data used is not well considered. i2i has no common process to monitor learners' progress towards their qualification.
22. Arrangements to support learners' literacy and numeracy needs on occupational programmes are inadequate. I2i has no skills for life policy or coherent plan to support these learners. Staff have attended non-accredited training but i2i has no plans to provide training for existing staff to achieve specialist qualifications.
23. The self-assessment process is ineffective and quality improvement plans are poor. Staff are insufficiently involved in the preparation of the self-assessment report or the evaluation of training programmes. i2i does not collect, record or analyse learner feedback effectively to evaluate the quality of provision. Employers are insufficiently involved in the overall analysis of provision. The self-assessment report is overly descriptive and does not critically evaluate the provision. The quality improvement plan is weak. Many actions are poorly defined and not time-bound. The new management team has identified these issues and has prepared a position statement and a revised quality improvement plan. These documents demonstrate a better understanding of the provision but can at best be considered as interim measures before the production of the next report.
24. Equality of opportunity is inadequate. The range of provision offered provides valuable opportunities for learners to benefit from training and development who would not otherwise have the opportunity. Many learners have low or no attainment on entry and all are welcomed into the organisation. Satisfactory policies and procedures are in place and complaints, grievances and disciplinary issues are dealt with sensitively and effectively. Support for staff, especially when personal difficulties have an effect in the workplace, is particularly good. i2i meets current government requirements on safeguarding.
25. The promotion, monitoring and reinforcement of equal opportunities are unsatisfactory. No staff training has taken place in equal opportunities other than a brief introduction and raising awareness for new staff at induction. A few staff have a very poor knowledge of fundamental principles of equality and diversity in providing wrong answers to simple questions asked of learners during their reviews. Some staff are very effective in promoting and reinforcing equality and diversity. The provider is beginning to use data to monitor the effectiveness of the equal opportunities policy, but no targets or performance indicators are set for equality of opportunity.

## What learners like:

- The very supportive and friendly assessors
- 'The increased awareness I have for health and safety'
- The opportunity to get a qualification
- 'The increased awareness and understanding of my job role'
- The opportunity to return to learning
- The ability to gain a qualification from the work I do every day
- 'I have a better understanding of how and why I do what I do, and how I handle situations'
- The opportunity the programme gives to complete a qualification in work time
- 'This will be really useful in the recession, my improved curriculum vitae will help with redundancy'
- 'It has made me appreciate what my work includes'
- 'The way the programme has made me think more about what I do'

## What learners think could improve:

- The tediousness of NVO
- The lack of planning for some assessor visits
- The limited progression opportunities
- The delay in starting the qualification
- 'The apprehension when the assessor is changed; this is my third assessor in six months'
- 'The way the qualification is changed when you start with the assessor'

## Sector subject areas

### Retail and commercial enterprise

Inadequate: Grade 4

#### Context

26. Of the 315 learners following NVQs in retailing and warehousing at level 2, 188 are working towards retailing and 127 towards warehousing qualifications. Sales consultants contact employers and interview learners to identify their eligibility and prior experience. Assessments of learners' preferred learning styles and literacy and numeracy skill levels take place before being allocated an assessor. Assessors visit the workplace approximately every three weeks to complete on-the-job assessments and coaching. Planned sessions at the beginning, middle and end of the NVQ programme provide learners with information, advice and guidance. Assessors review their learners' progress every 12 weeks.

#### Strengths

- Particularly effective use of activities to optimise assessment

#### Areas for improvement

- Slow progress of learners
- Weak induction
- Poor planning of learning
- Insufficient employer involvement in planning and delivery of learning

#### Achievement and standards

27. Overall success rates are satisfactory. In 2007/08 they were a low 56%. However, in the first five months of 2008/09 overall success rates have increased to 70%. Learners' progress toward their qualification is slow. Timely success rates are low in 2007/08 and have declined further in the year to date rates for 2008/09. i2i has identified this area for improvement and introduced strategies to improve progress. Although better monitoring and interventions are now in place, many learners remain behind their unit achievement targets.

28. Learners gain self-confidence while working towards their NVQ. Managers report increased motivation and time management. Learners are able to reflect on their work practices and evaluate how their acquired skills can improve their work roles. Learners value the opportunity to refresh their knowledge on key aspects of health and safety, consumer legislation and managing customer complaints. Most written work completed by learners is of a satisfactory standard.

## Quality of provision

29. The quality of provision is inadequate, as are teaching and learning. However, particularly effective use is made of learners' workplace activities to optimise assessment opportunities. Assessors use direct observation very effectively, combined with other assessment methods such as professional discussion or questioning, to check learners' understanding. Care is taken to identify where learners need further coaching. Other assessments such as written testaments and witness statements make good use of learners' work experiences and responsibilities. Assessors, with significant experience within the retail and warehousing sectors, plan their visits with the learner carefully. However, a few assessment plans contain insufficient detail on what the learners need to do to prepare for assessment. Assessors make copious notes to validate good assessment judgements. Little use is made of information technology to support assessment.
30. Resources are satisfactory. The workbooks used by assessors are effective in checking learners' background knowledge while maintaining their interest. The content of assessor-devised learning resources is generally good but the standard of some photocopies are poor. Prepared questions test learners' understanding but in some instances these are used mechanistically and are not tailored to reinforce or check learning appropriately.
31. Induction is weak. Arrangements to assess the literacy and numeracy skills of learners are adequate but little use is made of the outcome. Information on learners' preferred learning styles is collected at induction but it does not contribute to training plans sufficiently. Learners do not fully understand the NVO process and remain overly reliant on their assessors to manage the NVO on their behalf. The gap between induction and the start of the learners' programme is too long. In some instances, learners wait three months before they have an assessor. Planning of learning is poor, particularly at the start of the programme. Insufficient use is made of information collected through initial assessment. Individual learning plans are often standardised with the same optional units and comments recorded for all learners within the same workplace.
32. During the initial stages of the programme, planning takes insufficient account of the individual needs of learners. Some learners' work roles are insufficiently scrutinised to select the most appropriate NVO or optional units. Some selected units are insufficiently challenging. When learners' prior knowledge and experience are noted, it does not always effectively determine the most effective approach to planning their NVO programme.
33. Employers are insufficiently involved in their employees' training or assessment programme. Most are happy for assessors to work with their staff but are insufficiently involved in the planning of visits and assessments. Some managers are unwilling to allow time away from the shop floor for learners to complete professional discussions, participate in assessment questioning or receive

feedback. Few line managers take an active role in the review of learners' progress every 12 weeks.

34. Information, advice and guidance are satisfactory. Assessors provide satisfactory practical support to the learners. Structured support to assist learners who have literacy and numeracy development needs is available. However, few learners accept any support offered. Learners receive clear guidance on forthcoming assessments during their progress reviews and on the detailed assessment planning sheets. However, progress review records do not contain clear short-term targets and the evaluations of progress against individual learning plans are insufficiently detailed.

### Leadership and management

35. Leadership and management are inadequate. i2i has a clear understanding of the areas for improvement and has recently recruited a number of experienced assessors and regional managers. Managers are introducing a range of strategies to improve performance. However, it is too soon to assess the success of these measures. Communication and teamwork are effective. Managers meet with staff individually every month to support them and to discuss individual learner's progress. Although staff have targets linked to learner success, the monitoring of learners' progress is not collated to analyse trends or provide early notification of slow progress.
36. Internal verification is satisfactory although some sampling plans do not ensure all aspects of assessment are covered. Staff make little contribution to the self-assessment report. Promotion of equality of opportunity is generally poor. Information provided during induction is inadequate to ensure that learners have a clear and accurate understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Assessors use employers' equality policies during progress reviews to check learners' understanding. However, generally assessors do not reinforce learners' understanding during progress reviews.

## Business, administration and law

Inadequate: Grade 4

### Context

37. i2i provides NVQ level 2 in business administration, customer service and management and NVQ level 3 in business administration and management. It also offers an NVQ level 4 in management. Currently 775 learners are on customer service, 354 are on management and 47 are on business administration programmes. All learners are employed in businesses across the eight regions in which i2i operates.

### Strengths

- Particularly thorough assessment procedures
- Good recent initiatives to improve provision

### Areas for improvement

- Low success rates
- Poor planning of individualised learning
- Insufficient employer involvement in learners' programmes
- Poor arrangements to support literacy and numeracy needs

### Achievement and standards

38. Achievement and standards are inadequate. Overall and timely success rates are low in 2007/08 and remain low in the early returns for 2008/09. Very few learners complete within their expected learning periods. Achievements have improved since the recruitment of significantly more assessors in 2008/09, but it is too soon to assess if this is sustainable. Although some learners remain behind target, many are now making satisfactory progress.

39. Learners gain in confidence and self-esteem. They have a better understanding of the principles and practices that underpin their work roles. A few learners demonstrate improved skills, such as improved word processing and customer service. The standard of work in learners' portfolios is mostly satisfactory. However, some learners' programmes are insufficiently challenging relative to their prior experience.

### Quality of provision

40. The quality of provision is inadequate overall. Teaching and learning are also inadequate. However, i2i applies particularly thorough assessment procedures. Assessors plan and use a good range of assessment methods well to suit learners' workplace environments and job roles. They have a thorough understanding of the occupational standards. Assessors use each visit very effectively to gather the maximum amount of evidence for the whole qualification. They make thorough

and accurate judgements about learners' achievement and give clear, detailed and constructive feedback after each assessment visit. New assessors have easy access to advice and support from more experienced colleagues through an effective mentoring arrangement. Historically, there were a few a cases of poor assessment practices. However, these are now rectified.

41. Planning of learning programmes for individuals is poor. Staff make insufficient use of information they collect about individual learners' experience, existing competence, preferred learning style or long-term goals to plan individual learning programmes. Learning plans are poorly structured and are not individualised. They do not identify individual learning objectives or set challenging goals sufficiently. Staff set learners too few targets or learning objectives for personal or career development. Learners' progression from the sign up and induction stage to the full programme lacks continuity. Some learners endure long delays before learning and assessment commences.
42. Employers are not sufficiently involved in any aspect of the programme. They are insufficiently involved in setting goals to maximise benefits for both learners and their businesses. When signing up new employers, i2i does not clearly explain the nature and structure of work-based learning and does not effectively communicate the importance of good employer support. Some employers are insufficiently aware of the amount of time learners need to devote to their learning programmes or how they can help learners to progress rapidly. They do not routinely participate in progress reviews or work with i2i to maximise learning and assessment opportunities. Too few take the opportunity to use i2i's employer feedback questionnaires.
43. i2i offers an appropriate range of programmes that broadly meet the needs of learners and employers. However, for a few learners, the level of programme is too low relative to their job role and prior experience.
44. i2i provides inadequate information, advice and support for learners. Assessors support their learners through the assessment process well. However, i2i has poor arrangements to support learners with literacy or numeracy needs. Few learners are referred for specialist support. Where learners have identified a literacy need, assessors often respond by minimising the amount of written work required rather than providing support to resolve it.

## Leadership and management

45. Leadership and management overall are inadequate. However, i2i has identified some appropriate areas for improvement and has recently implemented a good range of initiatives to improve the provision. The new management team has rationalised and standardised documentation across all processes. Internal verifiers have begun to quality assure completed documents but this has not yet sufficiently improved the quality. Newly revised observations of assessment are beginning to link more effectively to staff training and development. Regional managers have been appointed recently and performance is more thoroughly



monitored. Information on learners near to, or beyond, their planned learning date is more accessible and used more effectively to plan assessor activity. However, assessor shortages remain a challenge in one region. Communications and the sharing of best practice have improved recently through regional meetings and are now satisfactory. Staff have a reasonable understanding of the strategic direction of the sector subject area. Resources are satisfactory. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced for their roles. Internal verification is satisfactory with appropriate sampling and regular standardisation meetings.

46. Quality assurance processes are incomplete. The self-assessment process does not include operational staff views and the report is insufficiently critical and analytical. It does not resolve some fundamental shortcomings in the quality of provision offered to learners. Where areas for development are identified, improvement actions have been slow.
47. The promotion of equality of opportunity is poor. Questionnaires to identify learners' understanding of equality do not effectively contribute to subsequent learning plans. The promotion of equality and diversity issues is overly superficial and does not adequately test or raise learners' awareness. Staff training in equality and diversity is insufficient and the monitoring of employers' equality of opportunity policies and procedures is insufficiently thorough.

## Annex

## Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning 'Train to Gain' programmes managed by the provider 2007 to 2009

All sector subject areas

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2007/08	overall	80	59%
		timely	138	35%
	2008/09 (5 months)	overall	349	59%
		timely	1558	9%

Retail and commercial enterprise

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2007/08	overall	16	56%
		timely	31	26%
	2008/09 (5 months)	overall	65	71%
		timely	330	10%

Preparation for life and work

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2008/09 (5 months)	overall	9	100%
		timely	48	6%

Business administration and law

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2007/08	overall	64	59%
		timely	107	37%
	2008/09 (5 months)	overall	275	58%
		timely	1180	8%

Note: 2008/09 data is 'part year' only and is representative of the first 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
- \*\* 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'