

Training, Assessment and Consultancy Services 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' 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:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Provision in construction was not inspected.

Description of the provider

1. Training, Assessment and Consultancy Services Limited (TACS) is based in Peterlee. It was formed in 2006 by the managing director to provide National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in the workplace under a subcontract agreement with Stockton Riverside College. TACS successfully applied to the LSC for a contract to market and deliver NVQs under the Train to Gain programme. LSC contracts account for approximately 85% of the provider's income. TACS also provides privately funded training to local and national businesses.
2. TACS provides publicly funded training and assessment for employed learners through the Train to Gain programme. Currently 16 learners are working towards level 2 NVQs in utilities metering operations, and 17 are working towards level 2 NVQs in performing manufacturing operations. A further four learners are working towards NVQs at level 3 in engineering maintenance.
3. TACS is owned and run by two directors. One is responsible for financial and human resource management and the other manages the training and curriculum. They are supported by a team of three full-time assessors, two of whom are qualified as internal verifiers, and one full-time administrator and a full-time quality co-ordinator.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management are all good. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies is good.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

5. TACS has a good capacity to improve. Although it has not been operating long enough to produce more than one full year of data, overall success rates are high and being maintained in the current year. All learners are making excellent progress in the current year, indicating a potential to further improve the good timely success rates.
6. The organisation continues to grow. Growth is managed well. TACS has recently appointed new managers specifically to develop its quality systems, to manage larger numbers of learners. Some of the developments are improving quality management and are beginning to benefit the learners.
7. The self-assessment process is thorough and inclusive. The views of all stakeholders are used well to assess the quality of the provision. This, combined with up-to-date numerical data, provides an accurate assessment of the quality of the provision. Inspection findings reflected many of the findings in the self-assessment report and matched the grades.

Key strengths

- Very high overall success rates
- Particularly effective development of employer-based assessment
- Good training in the workplace
- Good development of programmes to meet employers' needs
- Very effective support for learners
- Good management of growth and change
- Very effective management of training
- Particularly good employer engagement
- Good performance management and support for staff

Key areas for improvement

- Some poor target-setting in progress reviews
- Insufficient formality in planning processes

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

8. Achievement and standards are good. Overall success rates are very high at 96%. Of the 75 learners who left the programme this year, 72 achieved their qualification. Learners make good progress and most complete within the planned end date of their programme.
9. Most learners' portfolios are structured well and contain a good range of evidence. Learners take ownership of gathering evidence and compiling assessment portfolios.
10. Learners develop their skills and carry out tasks more quickly and efficiently through expert and formal coaching by senior staff in the workplace and visiting assessors. Learners develop an increased awareness of health and safety and correct working procedures.
11. No significant differences in achievement between groups of learners exist. Very small numbers of learners reduce the need for producing statistical analysis of the performance of groups of learners, but the systems are in place and minority groups are identified and treated appropriately.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

12. The quality of the provision is good. Training in the workplace is good. Learners complete a comprehensive initial assessment to identify any areas of training required. The results are discussed with employers and used well to develop good workplace training plans. On-the-job training is delivered by employers, supported by TACS' individual and small group training sessions. Employers have adopted NVQ standards effectively to develop well structured training programmes for areas such as health and safety. Learners' feedback on the quality of these training sessions is very positive. This strength was not identified in the self-assessment report.
13. Internal verification processes meet the requirements of the awarding body. A comprehensive moderation strategy ensures that both provider- and employer-based assessors apply a consistent approach to assessment. External verification reports for engineering and manufacturing indicate that assessment is good. Reports from external verification visits are shared at team meetings and reviewed by senior managers.
14. Training for employer-based assessors is very effective. TACS has trained and qualified nine assessors for the utilities sector, with a further three in training. The assessors are managers and supervisors based at depots throughout the

region. This assessor network enables assessment to take place rapidly and effectively. The positive effect on staff development has been recognised at one major employer by the award of an internal business excellence award. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.

15. The development of programmes to meet employers' needs is good. This includes the development of new qualifications for the utilities sector in collaboration with employers, sector subject areas and other partners. These qualifications are now established well as part of a formal career path for new employees. The programmes have led to significant improvements in health and safety awareness. Feedback from employers indicates that the introduction of NVQs and the standards they set have enhanced the quality assurance of manufacturing processes. Further developments planned include progression routes to provide the opportunity for learners to move to team leader and supervisory roles. TACS provides flexible workplace training and assessment for employers and learners which accommodates their working patterns and locations. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.
16. Induction arrangements are satisfactory. The NVQ is clearly promoted as a means to provide a skilled workforce and improve health and safety awareness and standards. Induction has a strong focus on preparing learners for assessment in the workplace. Equality of opportunity is only briefly covered during induction.
17. Support for learners is very effective. All learners complete a comprehensive assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. The results are clearly and sensitively discussed with the learners following induction. TACS has developed a productive partnership with a local college to deliver Skills for Life qualifications. At one employer, three learners have achieved Skills for Life qualifications and a further 12 are working towards similar qualifications. Support for learners with English as a second language is good. A well-designed assessment strategy enabled a group of migrant workers to successfully achieve NVQs. This strength was identified in the self-assessment report.
18. Learners receive satisfactory information, advice and guidance. Employers benefit from a comprehensive analysis of the organisational training needs. Feedback from employers indicates high levels of satisfaction with the advice and guidance provided by TACS.
19. Targets set during progress reviews are not sufficiently challenging. Targets are discussed and agreed, but most contain insufficient detail about the tasks to be completed. Targets are often focused on gathering a number of pieces of evidence for whole NVQ units rather than detailing specific work-based activities required for the unit. This area for improvement was not identified in the self-assessment report.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

20. Leadership and management are good. TACS is a new and growing organisation, and the management of the changes this growth brings is good. TACS is managing its range of provision very carefully. Before introducing new programmes or systems, directors ensure that staff capacity and capability are sufficient to maintain the quality of provision. New and appropriate staff are appointed where necessary, and staff receive sufficient and timely training and development. New developments generally arise from TACS' responsiveness to employers' needs and local and national priorities. Directors have set a clear strategic direction which is shared with and understood by staff.
21. Management of training is very effective. Training in the workplace is good. Performance management within TACS is particularly good and is carried out through individual weekly meetings between staff and a director together with a good appraisal system. Communication within the organisation is good. All staff meet with the director regularly to review their performance, and they receive good support to help them achieve company targets. The developing quality improvement arrangements are helping to ensure consistency of approach in a growing organisation.
22. Employer engagement is particularly good. TACS has good external networks of partners and contacts. Communication and partnerships with employers are excellent. Employers take an active role in training their employees. TACS provides very good training and support to allow them to do this. Learners benefit from the good training in the workplace, supported by the very good working relationships between TACS and their employers.
23. Staff development is satisfactory. Staff training is focused mainly on ensuring that assessors achieve and maintain the expertise demanded by awarding bodies. Recent training has taken place to raise staff awareness of equality and diversity and teacher training has been identified as a priority for assessors.
24. Quality improvement arrangements are fit for purpose for TACS at its current stage of development. It has identified the development of quality systems as an area for improvement. Inspectors agree with this judgement to the extent that the arrangements need to be improved to cope with future growth.
25. The self-assessment process is inclusive and the report is accurate. Effective staff training on the self-assessment process and assessing the quality of provision has taken place. This has also enable staff to contribute to grading and moderating the final report.

26. Arrangements for health and safety are satisfactory. The health, safety and welfare of learners in the workplace are monitored effectively by TACS assessors during assessment visits.
27. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place and recent training has raised staff awareness on matters of equality and diversity. TACS is sensitive to learners' individual needs and adjusts its individual training and assessment accordingly to ensure that no learners are disadvantaged. A particularly good example of this is the work that TACS has done in providing additional support for groups of migrant workers. Initial assessment identifies learners' support needs effectively. Learners requiring support generally receive it through a good partnership with a local college. Very small numbers of learners reduce the need for producing statistical analysis of the performance of groups of learners, but the systems are in place and minority groups are identified and treated appropriately. However, TACS does not promote the wider aspects of equality and diversity sufficiently. Equality of opportunity is rarely discussed with learners beyond the formal requirements of their qualifications. TACS has very few promotional materials to attract underrepresented groups into training.
28. The planning process is insufficiently formal. Although the directors have set a clear strategic direction and share it with their staff, formal documenting of company plans is insufficient. TACS has no overall strategic plan or clear strategic objectives. It has a rudimentary business plan but this has no clear links to strategy or strategic objectives. No formal staff development plan, or operational plan, linked to strategy, is in place.

What learners like:

- Support provided by TACS
- Knowledge and experience of assessors
- 'The NVQ has helped me with my job'
- Very helpful instructors
- Enjoyable training and assessment
- Ability of assessors to explain clearly

What learners think could improve:

- None

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on work-based learning Train to Gain programmes managed by the provider 2005 to 2008

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain	2007/08	overall	46	100%
		timely	46	74%

* 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'