

# Isis Training Services Ltd

## Inspection report

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Unique reference number: 52540

Name of lead inspector: Andy Harris HMI

Last day of inspection: 05 March 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

Address: Isis Training Services Ltd  
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## Information about the provider

1. Isis Training Services Ltd (Isis) was established 16 years ago as the subsidiary of the Engineering Trust, an employer-owned Group Training Organisation. The Trust, previously known as Oxford & District Training Group, has been operating for over thirty years providing training for engineering employers throughout the South East. Isis is a small organisation, employing the equivalent of five full-time members of staff.
2. Isis operates from offices and training facilities on a business park near Witney, Oxfordshire. It selects most learners itself, and then helps them find employment as engineering apprentices with firms throughout Oxfordshire and the South East. Isis also supports around 40 engineering apprentices employed by Thames Water. Initial selection and induction of learners take place at Isis' premises, then training and assessment takes place at further education colleges or other training providers, and at the learner's place of work. Isis assessors visit learners in the workplace to carry out assessment of their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).
3. Government-funded provision accounts for around 70% of Isis' work. The majority of learners are apprentices funded through the Thames Valley Learning and Skills Council (LSC). In 2008/09 Isis started training engineers through the Train to Gain programme. In all, 33 learners were recruited to the programme, but the offer has now been discontinued. At the time of the inspection there were just five learners who were still in training and this programme was not directly inspected.
4. The following organisations provides training on behalf of Isis:
  - Abingdon & Witney College
  - Oxford & Cherwell Valley College
  - Kingston College
  - Northampton College
  - Bedford Training Group/Bedford College
  - Aylesbury Training Group.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	33 learners 112 apprentices

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Grade 2
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	
Engineering and manufacturing technologies	2

## Overall effectiveness

- Isis is a good training provider. Apprentices finish their programmes promptly, and most are successful in gaining their planned qualification. Isis recruits potential apprentices carefully and then places them with supportive employers. These employers, and Isis, help learners to develop their skills and perform at a high standard. Formal initial training in colleges and other providers gives a sound foundation for the remainder of the apprenticeship programme; this off-the-job training is well monitored by Isis and improved when necessary. Frequent and helpful visits by Isis staff to apprentices in their workplaces help them progress well with their NVQ. Apprentices also benefit from employers' own training programmes, guidance from mentors, and appropriate resources. Isis does some outstanding work in liaising with other organisations and schools, mainly in a successful attempt to encourage more learners to consider engineering, and apprenticeships, as a career option.
- The management at Isis is good. Staff work well together, and the monitoring of the progress of individual learners is good, with prompt and supportive action taken where necessary. Self-assessment of performance uses the views of staff, employers and, increasingly, learners. Action planning is good. Effective management and a focus on the learner mean that this small and well-led company has the capacity to improve further. Lessons were learnt from its attempt to stretch its resources to take on a challenging Train to Gain

programme. Data from the LSC could be used better to analyse performance as it is seen by others, and some planned improvements need to be carried out without delay. Isis offers good value for money.

## Main findings

- Apprentices complete their courses promptly. Many apprentices finish their qualification well before their planned end date, and much faster than the national average for similar qualifications. This reflects good support from employers, Isis staff and a well-planned programme which includes regular and effective review visits.
- The quality of apprentices' work and the material apprentices gather for their NVQ are of a high standard. Portfolios of NVQ evidence are comprehensive and well presented, demonstrating a range of responsible tasks and high skill levels. Generally, achievement of qualifications is good, although the Train to Gain programme had outcomes below national averages.
- Employers and Isis staff work effectively with apprentices to ensure they develop their skills well. Nearly all apprentices have supportive employer-led training programmes which link neatly with the apprenticeship. Assessment and verification practices are satisfactory, although assessors have not yet been observed by the Isis verifier.
- Isis works in an outstanding way with organisations to develop its provision. Close links with training and employer organisations help Isis improve, and ensure organisations are well aware of Isis' courses. Very regular contacts with schools, including innovative and fun events, ensure that engineering, and apprenticeships, are presented in a positive way to potential learners.
- Learners are well supported throughout their programme. The regular visits by Isis staff to the workplace help learners progress, or promptly identify general areas of concern. Employers assist with resources, such as access to computers and time to study. Mentors in the workplace, guided by Isis, support training and help apprentices with any problems.
- Isis staff are well managed and led. Communication is very effective, and staff development is good. Progress of individual learners is very well monitored, although data used by the LSC to monitor Isis' performance is not used as effectively as it should be.
- Isis has developed satisfactory policies to cover the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, and staff understanding and action in this area are satisfactory. Some aspects, such as formal training and detailed procedures, are being fully completed. The safeguarding and safety of apprentices are checked in reviews, although this is currently under the heading of equality and diversity.
- Equality of opportunity is satisfactorily covered during induction and formal training. Planned reinforcement of the topic in reviews is sometimes done well, sometimes too briefly. The performance of various groups of learners is generally the same, except that younger learners have, at times, performed worse than the Isis or national rates.

- The monitoring of the colleges and others, who provide a great deal of formal training, is good. Very regular meetings, visits and discussions are constructive and lead to improvements in the college and at Isis. Individual monitoring of learners is good, including regular class visits when standards are checked. Problems are promptly identified and appropriate action taken.
- The self-assessment process at Isis is improving year on year. There is good use of employers' views, and an increasing emphasis on involving the learner in the formal process and other improvement activities. Action plans are clear, concentrate on improvements, and are well monitored.

### What does Isis need to do to improve further?

- Promptly implement planned procedures for observations of staff carrying out assessments, and then review the system and improve if necessary.
- Use the experience from Train to Gain to ensure that, when responding to future government initiatives, the full implications of the resources needed, the cost of any training, and the commitment required of employers are fully analysed before any strategic decisions are made on participation.
- Use LSC data in a more formal way to accurately guide high level business analysis and action planning, and in doing so promptly identify any potential areas for improvement.
- Make certain that the recent efforts to ensure that Isis is properly promoting safeguarding are enacted in the planned detail, and that policies, procedures, training and legislative requirements are routinely reviewed to ensure they remain effective and up to date.
- Make better use of monthly reviews to focus on safeguarding of learners, and at intervals use the reviews consistently to challenge and reinforce learners' understanding of wider aspects of equality and diversity, particularly in the context of employment.

### Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

#### What learners like:

- regular reviews that ensure that some progress is made every month
- the advice given by assessors – sometimes via email – to ensure that work is well presented
- assistance in getting interesting employment – and on occasions helping with new employment after redundancy
- clear explanations of the programme requirements
- interesting work, a variety of tasks and helpful employers
- guidance and support offered by mentors
- the professionalism and expertise of Isis assessors.

#### What learners would like to see improved:

- nothing of significance.

## Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

### What employers like:

- the assistance given by Isis in developing apprenticeship programmes that suit the learner and employer
- detailed and regular advice given to learners through reviews and general support
- involvement of employers in reviews
- the quality of the learners sent by Isis for job interviews
- assistance given by Isis to employers in selecting apprentices
- prompt responses by Isis to company or learner problems
- the professionalism of all Isis staff.

### What employers would like to see improved:

- ensure that college reports are available to employers in a reasonable time scale.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

7. Isis has shown it has good capacity to improve. Business planning for this small organisation is not sophisticated, but it encourages a culture of continuous improvement. Although an attempt to provide a Train to Gain programme was not fully successful, Isis's engineering apprentice programme is maintained at high standards and improved where appropriate. A close focus on the needs of individual learners continues to lead to generally good outcomes, with particularly good timely success rates. The self-assessment process, despite some inadequate use of LSC data, is continually improving with the full participation of staff, useful employer feedback, and an increasing involvement of learners. Action planning from the most recent report is detailed and well monitored. Isis is well led, and plays an important role with partners to improve the take-up of engineering as a career. Despite the small numbers of staff, Isis continues to develop new approaches to training and support of learners, such as the increasing use of electronic files and good use of emails and the internet to aid employer recruitment. Since the previous inspection main grades have improved and the main weaknesses have been dealt with.

### Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

8. Learners thoroughly enjoy their apprenticeships and make very good progress towards completion of their qualifications in interesting jobs. Apprenticeship timely success rates have been consistently well above national rates for four years. Overall success rates are generally good, although there is some variation between years from well above to around or just below engineering national success rates. The cohorts are small, leading to some large changes in percentages. Learners aged 16 to 18 do not always perform as well as older learners. The relatively small Train to Gain programme had unsatisfactory outcomes, although performance improved towards the end of the programme after problems were identified.
9. Apprentices attain high standards and develop good work-related skills. At work apprentices quickly develop a wide range of technical knowledge and very good practical skills. Very effective, well-structured, on-the-job training programmes enable apprentices to progress on to work which demands higher levels of technical skills and knowledge. All apprentices greatly increase their confidence. For example, one fourth year apprentice has been responsible for the production of a £200,000 dilution refrigerator. Apprentices produce comprehensive, well-presented NVQ portfolios. Photographic evidence is very effectively used and linked to clear and neatly-produced explanations. Good use is made of work-based records as supporting evidence. Apprentices demonstrate an outstanding knowledge of their apprentice frameworks and employer-based training programmes.
10. Throughout training programmes assessors and employer staff place great emphasis on safety, adherence to correct procedures and monitoring personal

concerns. Apprentices' awareness of safety is good; they use safe working practices and feel very safe at work and at college.

## The quality of provision

Grade 2

11. Support for apprentices' development, through a combination of college courses, employer training, and close support from Isis assessors is good. Apprentices have a clear understanding of the assessment process. Assessor observations are clearly recorded and regularly verified. The internal verification system is well planned and thorough. However, assessors have not yet been observed by their internal verifier while assessing the practical performance of their apprentices.
12. Progression opportunities for apprentices are good. Nearly all apprentices can undertake company sponsored higher level qualifications on completion of their technical certificates. Many progress on to higher national programmes; a few on to foundation or full engineering degrees. At one aerospace company, apprentices are encouraged to complete their Civil Aviation Authority qualifications before finishing their apprenticeships.
13. The range and content of training meets the needs and interests of users very well. Isis closely aligns the apprenticeship programme to a learner's employment. Employers appreciate apprentices beginning work with well-embedded basic engineering skills from their college work. Apprentices develop good employment skills including effective communication and the ability to liaise well with managers and colleagues of all ages. Key skills are started at college and completed in the workplace, and this meets the literacy and numeracy needs of learners.
14. Isis works in an outstanding way with employers, colleges, schools and other partners to meet the needs of young people. Managers and staff liaise very effectively with employers to develop company training and link it well with the apprenticeship programme. Routine links with employer and training organisations help Isis, and the organisations, in developing engineering provision in the area. Very regular work with schools, through seminars, visits and careers events, helps promote engineering, and Isis, as a career option. Events with schools, including fun challenges such as building a St George's dragon on an Isis-provided chassis, encourage budding engineers.
15. Very supportive visits to apprentices in the workplace take place at least monthly. Apprentices' progress is also regularly reviewed by a number of employers, in some cases every two weeks. Employers allow apprentices to carry out portfolio building and coursework during work times, providing facilities such as offices and computers. All employers have appropriately selected apprentice mentors in place. Some mentors, including managers, have been through the Isis apprentice scheme and the majority of mentors undertake a one-day mentor training programme with Isis.



## Leadership and management

## Grade 2

16. Managers and staff at Isis work very effectively together to maintain or improve standards on the apprenticeship programmes. Assessors are a mix of full-time, part-time and home-based staff. Monitoring of assessors' work is good, and communication is very effective. The routine work rightly focuses on improving individual learner performance, although there is also appropriate consideration of wider matters in the self-assessment action plan, or through individual projects such as examination of the new Qualification Curriculum Framework. Staff development is good. Isis is aware that if assessors also take on a wider role, such as coaching for functional skills, then they will have to have the necessary qualifications.
17. Trustees have appropriate experience. They monitor the financial aspects of Isis well. The board satisfactorily supports and challenges Isis' managing director, with some interesting debates on long-term proposals. The move from the established and well-run apprenticeships programmes into Train to Gain was not fully researched and led to some problems that took a while to resolve.
18. Isis satisfactorily promotes the safeguarding of learners. Staff and trustees are aware of their responsibilities and have had satisfactory briefings and written guidance. A safeguarding policy is well written and enacted. The very frequent contact with apprentices and close liaison with employers mean that any possible safeguarding issues are quickly identified and resolved. Some aspects, such as more detailed and formal training and the introduction of detailed procedures, are taking place, but a little later than Isis had initially hoped.
19. Overall Isis satisfactorily promotes equality, tackles discrimination and narrows the achievement gap. Apprentices have a reasonable reminder of equality and diversity during initial induction, reinforced through aspects of their apprenticeship programme and through their college courses. The monthly reviews are intended to reinforce this understanding, but this is carried out inconsistently. All assessors check and act on any problems of discrimination or unfair treatment, but only some extend that into a discussion of wider equality issues. The excellent work that Isis does with local schools is opening up the idea of apprenticeships, and engineering, to a wide range of potential learners. Learners are selected on merit, although proper allowance and support are made for those who have potential difficulties, for instance with dyslexia, to normal selection procedures. Selected learners then generally achieve well. Isis has reviewed the apparent underperformance of younger learners, but has been unable to identify specific aspects to improve.
20. Apprentices are becoming increasingly involved in helping promote improvements. As well as using questionnaires, Isis has held a one-day learner conference, attended by over half the apprentices. Amongst other things this is leading to the formation of an apprentice forum with representatives advising Isis on problems and potential solutions. The very close links with employers, both those with apprentices and those who are involved with engineering in the

area, also lead to improvements. Employers' views are also gathered through comprehensive questionnaires.

21. Isis works very closely with colleges and other training providers to ensure that their provision is of a good quality. Regular visits and meetings, including visits to the classroom, ensure that individual learner progress is well monitored. Any broader concerns are quickly identified and, in most cases, corrected.
22. Self-assessment is continually improving. The most recent report is accurate, and has led to a relevant, detailed action plan that is driving improvement. The report builds on the learner and employer involvement. The self-assessment process and other high-level management reports do not use LSC data accurately, with the possibility that concerns may be noted by the LSC before they are recognised by Isis. However, individual monitoring of apprentices is very well done, and Isis's own comprehensive data are well managed and used effectively for routine improvements.
23. Value for money is very good. A small number of staff are effectively deployed to achieve generally high outcomes. Resources have been obtained from a variety of sources and are well used. The company headquarters operates in a satisfactorily sustainable way. Financial planning and controls are good.

## Information about the inspection

24. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's managing director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the local LSC, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
25. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

## Isis Training Services Ltd

Learning types: 14 – 16: Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; 16-18 Learner responsive: FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; 19+ responsive: FE full- and part-time courses; Employer responsive: Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners		
Part-time learners	108	108
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Capacity to improve	2	
Outcomes for learners	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2	
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2	
How well do learners progress?	2	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	2	
Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*		
How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*		
Quality of provision	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2	
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	1	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	2	
Leadership and management	2	2
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*	3	
How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	3	
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	3	
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2	
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2	
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2	

\*where applicable to the type of provision

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