

In-Comm Training and Business Services Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

7–10 March 2017

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	Apprenticeships Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding	
Outcomes for learners	Outstanding	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Apprentices' achievement of qualifications is outstanding; the additional qualifications many achieve help to prepare them well for promotion opportunities and their future careers.
- Apprentices become very highly skilled engineers, business support staff and supervisors; they develop their skills rapidly and many undertake significant responsibility with their employers early in their apprenticeships.
- Apprentices benefit from highly effective support from trainers and employers that help them maintain rapid progress towards achieving their qualifications within the planned time.
- Apprentices' skills in mathematics, English and information technology develop to higher levels, reaching well beyond the standard required for their qualifications.
- Most engineering apprentices achieve high grades in their technical training and develop very high quality practical skills as a result of outstanding teaching, learning and assessment.
- Highly motivated apprentices take pride in their learning; they work hard and make rapid progress.
- Apprentices' behaviour and attendance throughout their programmes are exemplary.
- Employers play a significant role in planning and delivering high-quality apprenticeship programmes.
- Directors and senior managers are very ambitious and successful in achieving high standards.
- Leaders and managers are highly responsive in meeting the skills needs of the local and regional area.
- Rigorous governance arrangements provide high levels of support and challenge to managers and staff and have led to significant improvements in the quality of provision since the previous inspection.
- Apprentices' knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity, and of British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism, are not consistently strong for apprentices in each year group.

Full report

Information about the provider

- In-Comm Training and Business Services Limited (In-Comm) is an independent learning provider established in 1982. In-Comm's primary focus is to meet the training needs of small to medium-sized employers from the engineering industry located in the West Midlands. Off-the-job training takes place in centres in Aldridge and Shrewsbury.
- The provision has grown considerably since the previous inspection in 2015. Currently 334 learners are undertaking apprenticeship programmes at intermediate, advanced and higher levels across the subject areas of engineering and manufacturing technologies; warehousing and storage; business administration and customer service; supervisory management; and information technology. Around two thirds of the apprentices are on engineering programmes, with most of the remainder on business and management programmes. A very small number are involved in warehousing and information technology.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that trainers consistently reinforce apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity, British values and the risks of radicalisation and extremism, so that this is consistently secure throughout the cohort of apprentices.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Directors and the senior team are very ambitious and highly successful in pursuing high standards for the quality of provision. They communicate a clear vision and set highly appropriate values very effectively. These motivate staff and apprentices, who thrive and achieve excellent results. Apprentices, as a result, are very keen to achieve and do exceptionally well. They succeed in meeting their goals in the vast majority of cases. Directors and managers have implemented changes and improvements to apprenticeship programmes to excellent effect since the previous inspection. Through skilfully applying a thorough approach to planning, using experienced and expert staff, introducing improved training methods and high-quality resources, they ensure that the quality of training achieves very high standards with outstanding outcomes for apprentices.
- The senior team work closely with all staff, setting priorities and clear actions to follow. As a result, they have tackled rigorously and successfully in almost all cases the areas for improvement from the previous inspection. For example, managers use improved data and reports to monitor very precisely apprentices' progress and achievement. Managers ensure that staff monitor thoroughly individual apprentices' progress and take prompt actions to support apprentices where necessary. As a result, qualification achievement rates have improved significantly. The large majority of apprentices complete successfully within the planned time.
- Directors set out plans for developing the apprenticeship provision with vision and clarity. Staff engage wholeheartedly with a clear focus on the individual apprentices' needs. They provide very good support to enable them to progress and succeed. Teamwork among the staff is very good, enabling mutual support and the extensive sharing of good practice. The benefit to apprentices is visible in the extent to which achievement rates have improved in all of the subject areas since the previous inspection.
- Arrangements for performance management are rigorous and lead to high standards. All staff work towards challenging performance targets and have clearly defined responsibilities. Staff participate well in training and development activities to support improvement. The process of observing teaching and learning is being further strengthened through the observers undertaking a level 5 course in observation practice.
- Leaders and managers are ambitious to continue to improve and they set demanding targets to achieve this. They evaluate the provision accurately and implement well-considered and effective strategies to improve the provision to achieve and maintain high standards. They invest significantly in facilities and training resources which benefit apprentices. The purchase of lathes and millers for the engineering academy and upgrades to information communication technology facilities strengthen the training provision and support apprentices' achievement. In-Comm, as a provider, achieves high-profile external recognition for the quality of its provision. For example, it was runner-up in the national apprenticeship competition held recently, reflecting the high standards found by inspectors.
- The senior team are highly responsive to the priorities identified through the area's strategic economic plan, working closely with the local enterprise partnerships and other

strategic bodies in the region. For example, In-Comm, along with local engineering employers, is playing a major role and contributing very effectively to the development of a new engineering training and manufacturing centre in south Shropshire.

- Managers ensure thorough implementation of quality improvement strategies. Meticulous self-assessment enables the prioritisation of areas for further improvement. Quality reviews are appropriately self-critical and accurate with managers using data well to inform judgments. Managers use well the views of apprentices, employers and other interested parties to inform judgements. Clear actions with specific timescales are in place to achieve higher standards and continuously improve.
- Managers design, plan and provide apprenticeship programmes, effectively collaborating with employers. Engineering apprenticeship programmes provided at the main centre in Aldridge are of a very high standard and have maintained an excellent reputation with local employers over a sustained period. To further meet employers' needs, In-Comm has extended provision successfully to a wider geographic area. A very good example of this is the strong partnership work with employers in Shrewsbury, where In-Comm, together with local companies, has set up a successful training academy for engineering apprenticeships. Employers value highly the guidance and support they receive from In-Comm staff about apprenticeship provision and training generally. Network training events include group training forums and many other activities in the region in which In-Comm participates very effectively.
- Operational links with employers to plan training and assessments and to monitor apprentices' progress are highly effective. Trainers work closely with employers to plan and provide training, coaching and assessment. They monitor and review apprentices' progress systematically with employers. Employers value highly the gains in employability and social skills that apprentices make, such as in communication and problem-solving, and how they apply these to meet their needs as employees. Employers are very positive about the quality of support and training offered to apprentices and the excellent training resources.
- Leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and diversity, ensuring a constructive environment for learning. Managers monitor the progress and achievement of different groups of apprentices thoroughly and work to ensure that any gaps in performance are reduced. Actions to widen the participation of women in engineering have been successful. Staff participate in training and development to enable them to develop apprentices' understanding of equality and diversity. However, the impact of this training is not sufficiently strong, as learners do not have a consistently good understanding of how they may apply these values in the workplace. This is linked to an area for improvement from the previous inspection when learners' understanding of diversity and how they might apply this to the workplace was not sufficiently secure.
- Apprentices and staff work safely and well together, showing mutual respect. Staff promote apprentices' understanding of British values; apprentices' behaviour demonstrates that they live by these values. However, their understanding of British values and of what they need to do to protect themselves from radicalisation and extremism require further reinforcement beyond the level achieved through the induction process.

The governance of the provider

- Governance, led by directors of the company, is particularly effective. Directors and senior leaders provide highly focused strategic direction for the apprenticeship provision, setting out very clear objectives for standards and performance. They provide well-balanced challenge and support to ensure continuous improvement of the apprenticeship programmes. Directors have implemented very successfully almost all of the recommendations of the previous inspection report and improved very substantially qualification achievement rates.
- Directors hold the management team to account and work closely with them to implement changes and achieve high standards. Directors have made a significant investment in staff and resources since the previous inspection, which has benefited apprentices directly and enhanced the quality of the provision. Directors fulfil their responsibilities in relation to safeguarding apprentices and in carrying out the 'Prevent' duty.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Staff and apprentices display high standards in health and safety. Appropriately trained staff carry out comprehensive assessments of health and safety in the workplace. All staff promote safe working practices very well. Consequently, apprentices' understanding and application of health and safety are exemplary.
- Leaders have put in place a comprehensive safeguarding policy for apprentices which they review and monitor to ensure that it operates effectively. Appropriate staff checks are carried out. Regular training and updating takes place.
- An appropriately qualified member of staff is responsible for overseeing implementation of the policy and communicating with the relevant external agencies. Appropriate procedures are in place and working effectively. The awareness and understanding of safeguarding by staff and apprentices are good. Apprentices know how to keep themselves safe online.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Trainers have very high expectations of their apprentices' skills, knowledge and professional behaviours, and instil in them the importance of taking pride in their work. This prepares them well for the workplace and enables them to rapidly gain additional responsibilities at work.
- Apprentices benefit from excellent on-the-job training that extends their skills well and quickly enables them to become valued members of their employer's workforce. Engineering apprentices undertake particularly effective practical skills training off-the-job that equips them to use their hand-fitting and machining skills to produce tools and components with excellent accuracy and finish. Employers value highly the skills that apprentices gain, finding that they are quickly able to make valuable contributions to

their businesses.

- Coaching and mentoring in the workplace are excellent. Managers and engineers coach their apprentices very well in the workplace to help them develop their skills and complete their apprenticeships in good time. Apprentices benefit from highly supportive trainers and employers that inspire them to progress rapidly and be successful in their learning.
- Employers and trainers, particularly in engineering, work closely and make good use of information about apprentices' knowledge and skills levels to plan challenging programmes that meet their needs and aspirations well. Most employers ensure that apprentices receive the time and training they need to develop high-quality technical and business skills. Most apprentices benefit from detailed training planned and agreed by trainers and employers. This contributes to their rapid acquisition of excellent workplace skills.
- Employers value highly their apprentices' contributions in the workplace and often give them additional responsibilities at work, which further improves their confidence levels. For example, a business administration apprentice learned how to dispatch goods in a foam factory; an engineering apprentice rapidly gained responsibility for maintaining highly specialised metal finishing equipment which is critical to the company and its operation.
- Trainers carefully plan their frequent workplace visits to deliver high-quality training, carry out assessments or complete apprentices' progress reviews. This helps almost all learners achieve their qualifications rapidly. Trainers assist apprentices to reflect deeply on their personal and employability skills and set challenging targets for the production of assessment evidence that help them maintain rapid progress.
- Employers, often with highly valued input from trainers, are actively involved in the planning of their apprentices' workplace learning and are kept very well informed about their apprentices' progress, enabling them to provide additional support when required. Trainers liaise frequently and closely with employers to ensure that they are quickly aware of any apprentice's absence or slow progress, enabling them to agree effective corrective actions.
- Trainers encourage the large majority of apprentices to develop outstanding portfolios with a good variety of evidence to demonstrate their competence. Trainers assess apprentices' evidence thoroughly and accurately. Apprentices benefit from very clear feedback that accurately confirms when their work meets the required standard, along with particularly useful guidance that helps them extend and apply their knowledge and skills to complex workplace tasks.
- Trainers instil an excellent understanding of health and safety into their apprentices, which apprentices routinely use to work safely and professionally in their workplace and during off-the-job training.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Apprentices enjoy their learning considerably and take great pride in their work. They demonstrate this by displaying very high levels of motivation, and a desire to produce work of a high standard both in the training centre and in the workplace.
- Apprentices are self-confident and know what is required to be a successful learner. Trainers provide them with clear objectives and deadlines, which help them to produce work to a high standard and to agreed deadlines. Apprentices' behaviour and conduct are exemplary. Apprentices and staff display high levels of mutual respect. Attendance at both practical and theoretical lessons is outstanding, with 100% attendance in most lessons
- Apprentices gain particularly good practical skills both in the training centres and in the workplace. Engineering apprentices confidently operate complex computer-controlled machines which provide components to a very high specification for supercars, Formula One teams and the aerospace industry.
- Apprentices gain valuable skills to equip them for sustained employment, and employers give many learners very significant responsibility at work, sometimes at a very early stage in their apprenticeships. Examples include an engineering apprentice taking responsibility for an external quality audit by a major automotive manufacturer and a business administration learner with the responsibility for developing the production plan for a foundry.
- Engineering apprentices develop their mathematics skills very well throughout their programmes and can apply these in their job roles. For example, they can create components to a very high degree of accuracy. Business apprentices receive clear feedback on spelling, punctuation and grammar, which helps them to edit and improve draft assignments to the best final version. Apprentices use their English skills well to produce high-quality written documents and assessment evidence at work and in their portfolios.
- Apprentices receive very clear and accurate advice and guidance which direct them onto the correct course. Engineering apprentices are very clear about their progression routes from level 2 through to foundation degree and part-time degree courses. The progression routes for business administration apprentices are less well defined.
- Learners feel and are safe and have a good awareness of the potential dangers of using social media and emails. They are fully aware of how they can raise any concerns they may have.
- Apprentices receive useful information to help make informed choices about living a healthy lifestyle. Many staff and apprentices take up the opportunity to undertake a comprehensive health assessment each year by the local National Health Service trust. This includes blood sugar and blood pressure levels; smoking status; and body mass index. Apprentices also receive periodic newsletters covering topics such as eating disorders and binge drinking.

Outcomes for learners

Outstanding

- Outcomes for apprentices have improved considerably since the previous inspection and are now outstanding. The vast majority of apprentices successfully complete their courses in the planned time and at a level that is much higher than national rates. Engineering apprenticeship programmes have exceptionally high achievement rates; achievement on all programmes is well above national rates.
- Apprentices become very highly skilled engineers, business support staff and supervisors. They make considerable progress from their starting points and develop their skills rapidly. Apprentices produce work of a very high standard and their work is highly valued by their employers.
- All apprentice groups achieve well; there are no significant gaps between the performance of different groups over time. The few apprentices identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities do very well and achieve their apprenticeship on time.
- Apprentices make very good progress in developing their skills in mathematics, English and information technology. A high number of apprentices pass qualifications in these subjects at the first attempt; they develop these skills to a high level – beyond the standard required for their qualifications.
- Apprentices make very good progress into further levels of study, take on increased responsibility and gain promotion within their employment. Most engineering apprentices progress from an intermediate to an advanced apprenticeship. All business and management apprentices continue in permanent full-time positions after their apprenticeship and the large majority of engineering apprentices do likewise.

Provider details

Unique reference number	59237
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	486
Principal/CEO	Mrs Rebecca Phillips
Telephone number	01922 457686
Website	www.in-comm.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	89	126	33	82	-	4		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the one of the managing directors, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Roger Pilgrim, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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Jason Lancaster	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Robinson	Ofsted Inspector
Barbara Hughes	Ofsted Inspector

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