

Compliance Assurance Report

Absolute Training and Assessing Ltd

Address: Ty Cynon, Navigation Park, Abercynon, CF45 4SN

Date of Assurance Visit: 06/03/2024 – 07/03/2024

Quality Assurance Manager: Liz Emery

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVIDER:

Previous Assurance Visit Compliance Grade : GOLD

Previous Assurance Visit Premises Grade : GOLD

THIS ASSURANCE VISIT:

Compliance [Leadership & Management]: GOLD

Premises [Quality of Provision]: GOLD

DESCRIPTION OF THE SETTING

The 2023 visit was the first visit completed under the criteria of the RTAS Rules V2.1 and their fifth visit overall. The level of compliance is graded as described in the Quality Assurance Framework V4.0.

Absolute Training is a well-established training provider delivering a wide range of Track Safety Training and Assessment and On Track Plant [OTP] training courses commercially to the rail industry. Outside of rail, they also deliver a wide range of training, including First Aid, Fire Safety and Manual Handling.

The provider's main training centre is in Abercynon, South Wales and are approved to use five practical sites, the majority are in the nearby area which are used for OTP training and Track Induction. The main centre has good roads and nearby rail links.

KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASSURANCE VISIT

Compliance Leadership & Management

Grade: GOLD

GENERAL

POLICIES & PROCEDURES			
Operational Policies & Procedures	COMPLIANT	RISQS Certification	COMPLIANT
RTAS Specific Procedures	AFI IDENTIFIED	Sentinel Scheme Rule Adherence	COMPLIANT
Organisation Structure	COMPLIANT		
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training and Assessing Ltd has all the required policies and procedures. They are in date, signed by the director, and uploaded onto Skills Backbone. All policies and procedures seen were RTAS-specific and aligned to RTAS V2.1. However, one procedure still stated RTAS V2.0; this procedure should be reviewed and updated.</p> <p>The organisational structure details the various roles within Absolute Training and clearly identifies everyone, their job title and deputy. Absolute evidenced, signed job descriptions and inductions at the time of the visit.</p> <p>RISQ certification was valid and contained the required product codes for NSAR Track Safety Training.</p> <p>Absolute Training adheres to the Sentinel Scheme Rules and has an appropriate procedure that states its requirements and responsibilities as a Primary Sponsor of its staff.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Well written and current policies and procedures. 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review and update NSAR-P-006 as it still references RTAS V2.0. 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

TRAINER, ASSESSOR & VERIFICATION ASSURANCE

COMPETENCY MANAGEMENT			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Non-Operational Staff	COMPLIANT
Compliant With RTAS	COMPLIANT	Online Exams	COMPLIANT
Assured Individuals Competence	COMPLIANT	Observations	COMPLIANT
Workplace Assessments	COMPLIANT	CPD	COMPLIANT
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training has a procedure that covers the competence management of its Trainers and Assessors. This procedure was in date and fully aligned with RTAS V2.1.</p> <p>All individuals in assured positions held the correct qualifications and competencies to perform their roles. The Provider has a simple yet effective Competence Management System [CMS] in the form of an Excel Spreadsheet, which monitors the competencies of its Trainers and Assessors. The Competence Manager checks this spreadsheet monthly, and arrangements are made should a renewal be required.</p> <p>The requirement for Assessors to complete six workplace assessments annually is documented within their procedures and is aligned with RTAS V2.1. The Provider has easily met the requirement for the past 12 months due to its high demand for workplace assessments.</p> <p>The provider's procedures state the various RTAS requirements for non-operational trainers and assessors, including the requirement to complete their online exams. The procedure states all of the RTAS requirements for completing online trainer exams and exactly how Absolute Training will meet these requirements. Exams are scheduled within the required time frame by the Competence Manager, with either the Managing Director or Training Manager acting as the verifier for the exam.</p> <p>Absolute Training takes a proactive approach towards completing observations for its Trainers/Assessors. The scheduling of the observations is controlled by the Competence Manager, who ensures that observations are completed every quarter by scheduling them in. They have also embraced technology for completing the observation forms, with an online tool used to allow the trainers to complete an observation form on their phones. Absolute Training has written procedures that match this process and are aligned with RTAS V2.1. All completed observations are uploaded onto Skills Backbone.</p> <p>The Provider has a documented procedure for completing Continuous Professional Development [CPD]. The trainers and assessors are proactive with uploading CPD onto Skills Backbone, with their hours exceeding the required amount and submitting it well before the deadline.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Observations are planned well and completed to a schedule with good use of technology. 		

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	➤ N/A
NON-CONFORMANCES	• N/A

QUALIFICATION LEVEL	3	4	5	5+
Number of Assured Trainer/Assessors	4	0	0	1
Trainer/Assessors working towards	0	0	0	0

TRAINER, ASSESSOR & VERIFICATION ASSURANCE [continued]

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Verifier Competence	COMPLIANT
Compliant With RTAS	COMPLIANT	Process Requirements	AFI IDENTIFIED
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training has a dedicated section within its Training Delivery procedure for Internal Quality Assurance (IQA), aligned with RTAS V2.1.</p> <p>Internal Verification is completed by either the Managing Director or the IQA Manager, who holds the required qualifications, at a 100% sample rate. Although this appears not to be risk-based, the Provider has the required documents in place to evidence this systematic rationale, and despite the high volume of events completed by the Provider, verification is completed swiftly due to the proactive approach the whole Absolute Training team takes towards verification.</p> <p>Every course pack goes through three stages of internal checks. These checks start at the admin level before event notification to make sure all documents are in place. The paperwork then undergoes a peer review where each Trainer and Assessor checks over each other's work. Finally, official Internal Verification takes place by a qualified Internal Verifier. Despite this, during external verification, some minor issues were still noted; however, none of these were safety critical. It is advised that to keep IQA at such a high standard, the Provider creates forms that capture this good practice of these triple checks, and it is retained within the course pack as currently there is no such document for training events. Feedback from completed verification is shared face-to-face and recorded during team meetings.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	✓	The provider has a multi-check IQA process that functions at a high level due to the proactive nature of all staff involved.	
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	➤	Create a document that records IQA feedback for Training events.	
NON-CONFORMANCES	•	N/A	

RTAS ASSURANCE ARRANGEMENTS

ASSURANCE VISITS			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Visit Preparedness	COMPLIANT
Compliant With RTAS	AFI IDENTIFIED	Action Plan Completion	COMPLIANT
Annual Review / SBB	COMPLIANT		
FINDINGS			
<p>The requirements for NSAR Assurance Visits are documented within a dedicated procedure and state most of the RTAS V2.1 requirements. A small amendment is required to the procedure to add the statement that they will submit all requested documents. There were no issues during the visit; all documents were provided when requested.</p> <p>The 2024 annual review in Skills Backbone was completed and submitted. The current year's entry has been kept up to date with all current documents and certificates.</p> <p>Absolute Training was prepared for the Assurance Visit, and all team members were friendly and helpful. Packs requested for external verification were provided within the required 24 hours.</p> <p>The Procedures Manual states the requirements and timescales for completing and returning the action plan generated from an assurance visit. The previous Compliance Action Plan had been fully closed out within the agreed deadlines. The action plan for this visit will be closed out swiftly and effectively.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	✓	The Provider was well prepared for the visit and was helpful throughout.	
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	➤	Update the assurance visit procedure to state the requirement to submit requested documents.	
NON-CONFORMANCES	•	N/A	

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

PROVIDER			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Meetings/Briefings	AFI IDENTIFIED
Compliant With RTAS	COMPLIANT	Skills Fade	AFI IDENTIFIED
Toolkit Management	COMPLIANT	Additional Support	AFI IDENTIFIED
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training has various procedures that cover its responsibilities as an Assured Provider. These procedures require slight amendments and additions to align with RTAS V2.1 requirements.</p> <p>The provider has a documented procedure for managing training and assessment materials from the training toolkit. They have used technology to help create a system where trainers and assessors can only print the current training materials from the printer in the main office.</p> <p>Training team meetings are held monthly, and all team members are scheduled to attend. Meeting minutes are taken and saved electronically so all team members can access and review. No attendance register is taken for the meetings; this is a requirement of RTAS, and the Provider should implement this process immediately and update its written procedures accordingly.</p> <p>Briefings are completed via the team's WhatsApp group, where everyone acknowledges their understanding in the chat. Then, at the end of every month, the Compliance Manager creates a signature sheet that lists everything briefed that month, and all team members sign it, which is stored for audit.</p> <p>There is no written procedure for Skills Fade within the Provider's procedures; however, during the assurance visit, their process for monitoring was verbally explained. An appropriate procedure should be updated to contain this process.</p> <p>Absolute Training has a documented process for how learners can access additional support, including using readers and scribes. However, to bring it fully in line with RTAS, the procedure needs to be updated to include the name and signature of the person acting as the reader/scribe in the course pack.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Good use of technology to control training and assessment materials and to issue briefings to all team members. 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update processes so that an attendance register is completed for team meetings. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedures to include how they monitor possible Skills Fade for its trainers/assessors. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedures to include the requirement that the name and signature of reader/scribe should be retained in the course pack. 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES [continued]

EVENT PLANNING AND DELIVERY			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Course Management	AFI IDENTIFIED
Compliant With RTAS	COMPLIANT	Course Planning	AFI IDENTIFIED
FINDINGS			
<p>Planning and delivery of both Training and Assessment events is documented within Absolute Training's Training Delivery procedure. This procedure covers all aspects of planning and delivery required by RTAS. However, some sections need expansion, which will be highlighted below.</p> <p>The Training Manager is responsible for planning and booking courses. Their experience with the RTAS V2.1 scheme is apparent, with the processes working seamlessly, and external verification highlighted the efficiency and accuracy of this work. Once again, the Provider has embraced technology, using a computer system to help with the booking process and aid in compliance regarding course durations and delegate numbers. This system cannot check whether the provider and trainer have the correct capability to deliver the event. Although checks are in place for the Trainer/Assessor, there is nothing for the Provider. It is advised that a simple system check is added to the process and written into a procedure.</p> <p>The Events Calendar on Skills Backbone is populated for each course, with no discrepancies seen during external verification.</p> <p>The course durations are followed, and Guided Learning Hours [GLH] are adhered to, with only a few exceptions noted. The Provider has a risk assessment in place should a change to GLH take place; it was noted during external verification that one course had been shortened without a risk assessment taking place; it is advised that Trainers are reminded of this RTAS requirement and the process that the Provider has in place.</p> <p>As the Provider completes Track Safety Training, they require Safe Work Packs [SWP] for the PTS Practical. An external company provides the SWP used by Absolute Training with the correct accreditation. Although this has been completed, no written reference within the procedures states this; these procedures should be updated.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ An experienced administrative team works efficiently and to a high level of compliance. 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a process where Provider capability is checked before each course. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Brief Trainers and Assessors on the process for GLH. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedure to state that the SWP must be produced by a supplier who holds the correct RISQ codes. 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

MANAGEMENT SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS			
Procedure Present/Available	COMPLIANT	Notification of Results	AFI IDENTIFIED
Compliant With RTAS	COMPLIANT	Extensions of Scope	COMPLIANT
Management Of Breaches	AFI IDENTIFIED	Registration/Upskilling	COMPLIANT
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training has a dedicated procedure that covers the rail misconduct process and how they would manage breaches of the RTAS Scheme. This procedure aligns with RTAS; however, it requires small additions to ensure it covers all RTAS requirements. These areas were highlighted in the provider action plan.</p> <p>The Provider has a procedure covering the notification of results on Sentinel and whose responsibility is to complete the notification. The Training Manager notified the Sentinel Database of the event outcome once the course paperwork had been submitted and its first check was done. During external verification, events were notified within the required period despite this time frame needing to be stated within the written procedures.</p> <p>The process for increasing the Provider's scope was documented within a procedure and aligned with RTAS.</p> <p>The Provider has a detailed and dedicated procedure for registering and upskilling Trainers and Assessors. During the assurance visit, the Provider talked at length about their passion for finding and developing new talent, and their knowledge of the upskilling process backs this up. However, their detailed procedure needs to include the step of First Time Observations required for new Trainers.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Provider invests and is passionate about the upskilling of new Trainers and Assessors with a detailed, dedicated procedure. 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedures to state what is required of a Provider should an investigation take place. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedures to state that Sentinel is notified of any result within 21 days. 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update procedures for Trainer and Assessor upskilling to include the First Time Trainer Observations process. 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

DESCRIPTION OF SETTING
<p>Absolute Training main office and classrooms are based on a secure business park in Abercynon in South Wales. This is a rented facility with good road connections and ample parking.</p> <p>Although they use a wide variety of practical sites nationwide, they have their own practical site based in Pontyclun which is used for Track Induction. This site is located 15 miles from the head office.</p>

HEALTH & SAFETY			
Access/Egress	COMPLIANT	Fire Safety	AFI
Security	COMPLIANT	First Aid	COMPLIANT
Documents	COMPLIANT	Carbon Management	COMPLIANT

FINDINGS

Upon arrival, a full briefing was given around any planned fire alarms, welfare facility location and muster point location - There is a signing-in book for all visitors at the front reception.

The required H&S poster is displayed within the building with the correct staff identified on the poster are those cited on the organisational chart.

Fire equipment is serviced by the landlord of the building and copies of the services are retained by the Absolute Training and evidence provided.

All Fire Equipment is serviced and in date across the building.

There is a fire escape route map, but this is NOT displayed in any areas of the building (See AFI below), however, all fire alarm testing is evidenced and is provided and retained and all fire drills and practice evacuations are evidenced and retained.

Emergency lighting is located across the building and is well maintained and there are always 2 trained fire wardens on site, and this has been evidenced with in-date certificates.

There are x5 trained First Aiders on site and the provider evidenced their credentials by way of certificates.

POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ A full safety briefing was given where information for expected fire alarms, muster points and the location of welfare and toilets
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ There is a high number of trained staff for First Aid and Fire evacuation

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	➤ Although there is a fire evacuation plan, this is not displayed for staff, delegates and visitors to use as an aid in the event of a fire evacuation. This MUST be displayed as soon as possible.
NON-CONFORMANCES	• N/A

WELFARE			
Refreshments	COMPLIANT	Smoking Facilities	COMPLIANT
Breakout Area	COMPLIANT	Changing Facilities	COMPLIANT
Toilet Facilities	COMPLIANT		

FINDINGS	
<p>There are 2 areas for delegates to use the refreshment facilities with hot and cold drinks provided. The facilities are clean and well maintained throughout the building.</p> <p>There is a suitable break out area known as a ‘Stand Down Room’, where delegates can sit and use the hot and cold refreshments available. In addition, there is a communal water fountain in the reception area for all staff, delegates and visitors to use.</p> <p>Toilet facilities are clean and tidy and cater for male, female and disabled users. They are on each floor of the building with suitable sanitary and hand/wash facilities. There are also shower facilities on each floor for staff and delegates to use.</p> <p>There is a smoking shelter located to the side of the building with suitable facilities to dispose of cigarettes.</p> <p>The Training Provider has shower facilities and provides additional PPE for delegates if they forget or do not have the correct PPE at the time of the training event.</p>	

POSITIVE FACTORS	✓ Well maintained welfare and toilet facilities available
	✓ Shower areas available across the building for staff and delegates to use
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	➤ N/A
NON-CONFORMANCES	• N/A

CLASSROOM			
Suitable Sizes	COMPLIANT	Lighting/Heating/Electrical	COMPLIANT
Clean & Tidy	COMPLIANT	Classroom Displays	COMPLIANT
Office Equipment	COMPLIANT	Suitable ILT	COMPLIANT
Suitable For Assessments	COMPLIANT	Components & Equipment	COMPLIANT
FINDINGS			
<p>Absolute Training have several well-equipped classrooms across the building, and they are all standardised in the way they are laid out as well as having appropriate literature displayed on walls.</p> <p>Each classroom has specific literature displayed to align to capabilities being delivered in that specific room.</p> <p>All classrooms have good, natural lighting with ICT available as well as several visual and physical aids available for the trainer to use to enhance learning opportunities.</p> <p>All classrooms are well laid out and can cater for the correct number of delegates, as per Network Rail lesson plans.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Classrooms are set out with specific literature displayed relevant to the competencies being delivered 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ All classrooms are well equipped and have a good learning environment 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ N/A 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

PRACTICAL AREA			
Risk Assessed	COMPLIANT	Complies to Training Plan	COMPLIANT
Signed Task Brief [Non-NRMI]	AFI	Tools & Equipment	COMPLIANT
FINDINGS			
<p>The TP has a Work Package Plan that covers the 'Pontyclun' test track area. This Plan has a risk assessment, photos of the area, emergency arrangements as well as a google map location. However, it was advised at the time of the visit that this plan needs amending to allow all trainer and delegates to sign the briefing before any practical activity is carried out. See AFI below.</p> <p>The practical area is used for TIC delivery and conforms with the required training standards. The site is not used frequently and could benefit from some general tidying. For example, overgrown shrubs to be cut back and walkways cleared to avoid any potential trip hazards. See AFI below.</p> <p>As cited on the plan, all staff must carry suitable First Aid equipment and Firefighting equipment whilst delivering on the test track.</p> <p>Absolute Rail do not own any tools or machinery and they hire them in on a need's basis.</p> <p>The track is suitable to deliver Track Induction and there is plenty of space for delegates to maneuver around the area safely.</p> <p>During the visit, the access point for PTS track walkout was observed and this change of access point is due to the management team identifying the new location as having more opportunities for delegates to observe additional infrastructure such as Overhead Lines.</p>			
POSITIVE FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The provider has changed location for the PTS walkout to allow more learning opportunities 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The Work Package Plan is detailed and cites trainer requirements for emergencies 		
AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (AFI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The provider to revise the Work Package Plan to allow all delegates and trainers to sign the briefing before each test track visit 		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute Training to carry out some general housekeeping of the test track 		
NON-CONFORMANCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A 		

QUALITY ASSURANCE MANAGERS STATEMENT

Overall Absolute Training and Assessing continue to work to a high standard while meeting the requirements of RTAS V2.1. The Managing Director of Absolute Rail has a strong passion for Rail Training, and he cares about what he does and as a result has built a team around him that follows the same work ethic. The team is knowledgeable and work well together which helps Absolute Training and Assessing to keep growing and aiming for the next company objective.

Findings have shown that there is a strong ethos throughout the team in working together to check and double check each other's work. This is apparent with the process of admin checks, peer reviews and finally Internal Verification. To help maintain this high standard the Provider should look at ways of better capturing the outcomes of Internal Verification.

The overall standard of the policies and procedures were good with them clearly stating what Absolute Rail does to comply with RTAS requirements. However, they need slight expansion in certain areas to make sure everything is covered and to help make their procedures fully compliant. These changes are minor and do not compromise the high standard of compliance that was demonstrated during the assurance visit.

External Verification highlight minimal issues, with the overall quality of the packs being good and a high level of standardisation across all the Providers Trainers and Assessors. With external verification only highlighting mainly human errors, it shows the effectiveness of the procedures in place.

The Provider has an environmental policy in place and is committed to reducing their Carbon Footprint by making small everyday changes and encouraging its Learners to do the same.

The actions identified within the action plan are minimal, with the areas for improvement that have been identified are purely for the strengthening of their procedures. It is anticipated with the proactive approach taken by the Provider the action plan will be completed swiftly and effectively.

JUDGEMENTS

JUDGEMENT	HOW THE GRADE IS ACHIEVED
Gold	Gold grade will be awarded when all Compliance Leadership & Management and Premises Specification requirements are met and/or exceeded with no Compliance Action Plan required.
Silver	Silver grade will be awarded when Compliance Leadership & Management and Premises Specification requirements are mostly met with a minimal Compliance Action Plan required.
Bronze	Bronze grade will be awarded when Compliance Leadership & Management and Premises Specification requirements are mostly not met with a significant Compliance Action Plan required or the Assured Provider is a New Provider with insufficient time passed to generate the required volume of evidence to demonstrate compliance to requirements.
Inadequate	<p>Inadequate grade will be assigned when Compliance Leadership & Management and Premises Specification requirements are not met with a large Compliance Action Plan required and/or where non-conformances identified are of a safety critical or deliberate breach nature.</p> <p>The provider will be suspended from delivery until it can demonstrate to NSAR that the areas for improvement have been addressed, which must be within 4 months. Where corrective actions are not implemented within 4 months Assurance to deliver training and/or assessment will be withdrawn for a period of no less than 6 months. Assurance to deliver training and/or assessment may be permanently withdrawn.</p>

NEXT STEPS

The provider will receive their next Assurance Visit:

- **Gold** – between 18-24 months from the date of the last visit [subject to change].
- **Silver** - between 12-18 months from the date of the last visit [subject to change].
- **Bronze** – between 9-15 months from the date of the last visit [subject to change].

NSAR operates an unannounced visit regime, whereby the provider can be visited without notice at any time between assurance visits.

In addition, Delivery and Observation visits of training/assessment delivery is undertaken to evaluate quality of Leadership & Management, Quality of Training, and Personal Development, Behaviour & Welfare. Delivery and Observation visits can be both unannounced and notified.

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