

Westward Pathfinder

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53565

Name of lead inspector: Penelope Horner HMI

Last day of inspection: 23 February 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Westward Pathfinder (WP) is an independent charitable trust serving young people and adults in Devon. It was established in 1994 as North Devon Pathfinder Trust (NDPT), changing its name to Westward Pathfinder following its purchase of Westward Training and Personnel Ltd (WTP) during 2010. Both providers operated separately until 1 January 2012, when they formally merged.
2. Westward Pathfinder offers classroom-based courses in information and communication technology (ICT) and Skills for Life at learning centres in Exeter, Taunton and Torquay. Since 2006, it has offered National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), and more recently Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) units in a range of subject areas to adult learners in employment. It began to offer apprenticeships in 2010/11. Most of its work-based learners are employed at locations in the south of the county. Westward Pathfinder also offers learndirect programmes and programmes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and the European Social Fund that are not in scope of this inspection.
3. Westward Pathfinder is led by a chief executive officer. He is supported by a team of operational and administrative managers and officers. Westward Pathfinder employs six peripatetic assessors who provide coaching, support and assessment for work-based learners, and four tutors who provide training, support and assessment for learners on its classroom-based courses in ICT.
4. The county of Devon is predominantly rural; most of its urban areas are in the south of the county. Its economy is based largely on tourism, hospitality and care. Work is often seasonal and unemployment levels are higher in coastal areas of the county, particularly during winter months. Devon has one of the lowest minority ethnic population rates in the country.
5. Westward Pathfinder provides training on behalf of the following providers:
 - PETROC
 - Careers South West
 - Prospects.This training was not in scope of this inspection.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2010/11
Provision for adult learners: Further education (19+)	132 part-time learners
Employer provision: Train to Gain Apprenticeships	281 learners 10 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
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Capacity to improve	Grade 4
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3

Subject areas	
Health and social care	3
Information and communication technology	3

Overall effectiveness

- Despite the challenges of bringing two organisations together, managers and staff at Westward Pathfinder have maintained a satisfactory service for learners on work-based learning and on classroom-based courses. Work-based learners gain good skills, and on classroom-based courses they gain confidence and competence in a variety of computer applications. The proportion of learners gaining their intended qualifications is satisfactory. Tutors and assessors provide satisfactory coaching, assessment and support for learners. Westward Pathfinder's leaders and managers communicate a clear ethos for the service they offer and know what needs to be done to improve provision. However, they have not yet established a cycle of quality assessment and action planning that leads to sustained improvement in the quality of provision.

Main findings

- On classroom-based courses, the proportion of learners gaining an intermediate qualification is high, and above national rates. On work-based learning, the

proportion of learners gaining their intended qualification is satisfactory, although it is just below national rates. However, many learners make slow progress and do not complete their qualifications within planned timescales.

- Learners generally develop good skills and knowledge at Westward Pathfinder and they enjoy their courses. The standard of their work is satisfactory or better and they understand and make use of safe working practices. Their employers value the improved skills that learners gain during their training.
- Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. Tutors and assessors are experienced and give learners good encouragement and motivating support. However, they do not plan sufficiently detailed individual learning programmes for learners. On work-based learning programmes, assessors set insufficiently specific targets for learners. They provide insufficiently detailed feedback to enable learners to make better progress.
- Partnerships with employers in the care sector are strong and used well to support learners on health and social care programmes. Many links are well established. Assessors provide useful additional information and support to employers to help keep their staff up to date with current practice in the sector.
- Tutors and assessors support learners effectively and sensitively. If learners have additional literacy or numeracy skills needs, they provide helpful individual encouragement and guidance to enable learners to overcome these barriers and complete their qualifications.
- Staff in the newly-merged organisation have a good understanding of its ethos of commitment to learners, especially those who are disadvantaged in the labour market. At recent Westward Pathfinder team meetings, staff contributed well to the development of the merged organisation's mission statement.
- Since the merger, managers have made rapid recent progress in developing the organisation, particularly at its centres in south of the county. They are successfully developing an organisational culture that is open, collaborative and consultative. However, the new organisational structure is not well established, and some newly-appointed managers are not fully confident in their roles.
- Westward Pathfinder is successful in achieving its mission of enabling people from disadvantaged groups to join or remain on their chosen programme. It makes good use of the different programmes and strands of funding available to support learners and enable their participation.
- Westward Pathfinder's promotion of equality and diversity, and of safeguarding, is satisfactory. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity and of their rights and responsibilities at work is satisfactory. However, Westward Pathfinder has taken insufficient action to develop and reinforce this understanding or to promote its training in health and social care to men.
- Managers do not make sufficient use of data on learners' qualification outcomes to monitor and evaluate provision or to set targets for improvement in qualification success rates. For some time prior to the merger, and since, managers have had insufficient data to enable them to make detailed judgements about provision.

- Although WP has sound arrangements for providing literacy and numeracy training for work-based learners who are able to attend its learning centres, it does not have a clear strategy for improving these skills in learners who are unable to attend these centres.
- Westward Pathfinder's quality improvement arrangements are incomplete. The processes that currently exist are not implemented across the company or are too informal. They are not part of an inclusive self-assessment process leading to a plan for the improvement or development of provision. Westward Pathfinder's recent self-assessment report over graded some of its provision. It had not prepared an associated improvement plan.

What does Westward Pathfinder need to do to improve further?

- Develop and implement a programme of quality monitoring and action planning for improvement in order to improve the consistency and quality of provision.
- Make better and more regular use of qualification outcomes data to monitor and evaluate provision and to set targets for improvement.
- Implement a programme of development for staff to enable them to plan individual programmes and support learners' development more effectively, so that learners make better progress.
- Continue to develop the culture of the organisation so that the open, collaborative management style becomes well established and newly-appointed managers become more confident in their roles.
- Develop and implement a strategy that enables all learners who need to improve their literacy and numeracy to have access to appropriate provision.
- Promote equality and diversity more effectively to reinforce learners' understanding and to help encourage more men to participate in training in health and social care.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- that Westward Pathfinder is a good place to learn new skills
- the supportive, friendly assessors and tutors who explain things clearly
- having problems sorted out quickly
- getting feedback on their work in care settings
- getting a qualification while working
- developing ICT skills for employment.

What learners would like to see improved:

- the opportunity to attend off-the-job training sessions in health and social care
- measures to reduce the amount of paperwork they have to complete.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the honest and friendly staff
- the support provided by Westward Pathfinder staff
- the way Westward Pathfinder improves the skills of their staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- no improvements identified.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 4

7. Managers at Westward Pathfinder have been successful at maintaining satisfactory provision for learners during a period of significant change for each merging organisation. Although managers recognise that improvements are needed, the collection of information to support self-assessment and action planning is patchy or has fallen into abeyance. Westward Pathfinder does not have a clear quality system or a planned programme for monitoring and improving provision. It does not have a development or improvement plan. Managers and staff are keen and willing to take action to improve provision. They respond well to learners' and employers' suggestions for improvement. However, they have not yet established a history of quality improvement in the programmes inspected during this visit. Since their previous inspections, WP has not made significant, or sustained, improvements in the proportion of learners who gain their intended qualifications in either of the organisations that have recently merged. Several areas for improvement identified at their previous inspection remain and some of the progress identified at Westward Training and Personnel's previous monitoring visit has not been sustained.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

8. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. In 2010/11, just over 80% of work-based learners completed their qualifications successfully. On classroom-based courses in ICT at intermediate level, the proportion who gained the qualification in 2010/11 was high and, at 83%, was above national rates. However, this overall picture masks differences in learners' achievements in different subject areas, across the north and south of the county, and between men and women. The proportion gaining a qualification in learning for life and work, and in business administration in the south, has generally been high. However, in business administration in the north, and in health and social care in the south, it has been low. At foundation level in ICT, the proportion of learners who gained the qualification was 75% and below national rates.
9. Many learners on work-based learning programmes make slow progress and do not gain their qualifications within planned timescales. In provision managed by Westward Pathfinder in 2010/11 and before its merger, the proportion of learners who gained their qualifications within planned timescales was nearly 20 percentage points below the national rate of 82%; at Westward Training and Personnel in 2010/11, it was 30 percentage points below the national rate. Although North Devon Pathfinder Trust made improvements in the proportion of learners who gained their qualifications in 2009/10, this improvement was not sustained in 2010/11.
10. Notwithstanding this slow progress, learners generally gain good skills and knowledge and they enjoy their courses. In ICT, they become confident and competent to use a range of computer applications. In health and social care,

their knowledge and understanding of care procedures and medication protocols improves. Learners are motivated by their training. Learners feel safe and understand how to apply safe practices at work or at their computers. The standard of their work is satisfactory or better.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

11. Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. Tutors and assessors are experienced and give learners good encouragement and motivating support. On classroom-based courses in ICT, tutors make good use of resources, but are over reliant on the workbooks that learners use to guide the development of their skills. They do not do enough to plan individual learning programmes for learners and, as a result, some learners make slow progress during their sessions. Tutors give individual learners good demonstrations which are very effective in helping them learn. However, they do not make sufficient use of small group demonstrations or of a wider range of resources to help learners progress.
12. Assessors make good use of their knowledge and understanding of residential and community care to provide effective coaching and guidance for learners on work-based learning programmes. They give good encouragement to learners to motivate them to learn. Their assessment of learners is timely and provided to meet their needs. However, assessors' initial assessment of learners is not always used to prepare sufficiently detailed or realistic individual learning plans to guide their progress. Assessors set insufficiently specific targets for learners at their progress reviews and do not always provide sufficiently detailed feedback to enable learners to make better progress.
13. Westward Pathfinder's programmes meet learners' and employers' needs and interests satisfactorily. Classroom-based courses are provided flexibly and learners may attend for individual study at times that are convenient for them. On work-based learning programmes, assessors adapt the frequency and timing of their visits to fit in with employers' work demands. They provide effective and sensitive additional support to help learners to overcome literacy and numeracy barriers to completion of their qualifications. However, WP has unclear arrangements for providing training in literacy and numeracy where learners are unable to attend its learning centres.
14. On work-based learning programmes, partnerships with employers are strong and well established. Assessors on health and social care programmes keep up to date with developments in the sector and provide helpful additional guidance and training for employers. Westward Pathfinder's senior managers have well established links with a wide range of external organisations and contribute effectively to the planning of provision in the region.
15. Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory, and effective in helping learners during their studies. Assessors and tutors give clear initial information and guidance on learners' programmes. They are accessible and

responsive when learners need additional help. Westward Pathfinder has links with a wide range of external agencies that can provide additional specialist support if necessary.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

16. Since the end of 2011, leaders and managers at WP have made rapid recent progress in developing the merged organisation, leading to a more professional learning environment at the centre in Exeter and a new management structure for the organisation. They have been successful in communicating an organisational ethos based on a commitment to serving the needs of learners, and especially those who are at most disadvantage in the labour market. Across the organisation, staff understanding of this ethos is good. The board of trustees is well informed and provides effective governance and support for senior managers. These managers are successfully developing an open and collaborative management culture across the organisation. They are effective in encouraging better communication and the exchange of information and ideas among WP's dispersed staff. However, the structure is not well established and some departmental managers are not yet fully confident in their new roles.
17. For some time, senior managers have had insufficient access to a full range of qualification outcome or success rate data and they have made insufficient use of the data that has been available to monitor and evaluate provision or set targets for improvements in success rates.
18. Although WP has suitable arrangements for meeting learners' additional support or literacy and numeracy needs at its learning centre in Exeter, it does not have a suitable strategy for meeting these needs among learners who are unable to attend the centre on a regular basis.
19. Westward Pathfinder's safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Westward Pathfinder carries out appropriate risk assessments and checks on staff to ensure they are suitable to work with young people and vulnerable adults. It paid close attention to the health and safety of staff and learners, and to their safeguarding, in its recent organisational changes, and has suitable processes for recording and reporting concerns. All staff have had suitable training in safeguarding and WP uses a range of methods to promote safeguarding to learners. However, it does not always make sufficient use of progress reviews with learners to check or reinforce their understanding of safeguarding.
20. Westward Pathfinder makes good use of a range of programmes and funding strands to enable learners to participate or to remain on programme. It has strong links with a wide range of organisations to provide strategic influence and promote participation. At its learning centres, it provides good support for learners with additional needs and has a wide range of adaptive technology for learners to use. Outcomes for learners with additional learning needs match those of learners without such needs. Its recruitment profile broadly matches that of the local population. However, it has not done enough to promote

provision to under-represented groups in specific sectors. For example, it has not promoted health and social care to men to encourage more to take up careers in care. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Assessors do not make sufficient use of progress reviews to reinforce learners' understanding.

21. Westward Pathfinder's staff are responsive to learners' and employers' requests and suggestions for improvement. It has satisfactory arrangements for gathering feedback from ICT learners and has held useful learner forums to gather feedback in the north. A former learner is a valued member of the board of trustees. However, WP's arrangements for involving service users in the evaluation of provision or in making decisions about improvements are not routine or systematic.
22. Senior managers have made a good start in making changes to help improve provision in the merged organisation. However, they have not yet developed formal or structured processes for quality monitoring and improvement or to monitor the impact of the changes they make. Although some quality assurance activities take place, they are incomplete. In the past, managers have been over reliant on informal processes that do not give sufficiently detailed information on good practice or areas for improvement, particularly in key aspects of learners' programmes such as initial assessment, individual learning planning or the quality of progress reviews. Westward Pathfinder does not yet have a quality assurance plan linked to self-assessment or a plan for the development or improvement of provision. Its current management structure does not clearly identify those staff with overall responsibility for quality improvement. WP's most recent self-assessment report identified some strengths and areas for improvement identified by inspectors. However, it missed several areas for improvement in key aspects of learners' programmes. Provision in work-based learning was over graded.

Subject areas

Health and social care

Grade 3

Context

23. Westward Pathfinder offers training programmes to adult learners employed in social care settings. These include residential homes for older people, those with disabilities and care in the community. Currently, 39 learners are in training. Of these, 21 are working towards NVQ qualifications at level 2, 11 towards qualifications at level 3 and seven towards qualifications at level 4. Two learners are on apprenticeship programmes. Six learners are men. Individual training and assessment for learners is provided in the workplace by assessors employed by WP.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. In 2010/11, the proportion of learners gaining their NVQ was broadly in line with national rates of 85%. However, learners working towards intermediate qualifications made slow progress and only 38% completed their qualifications within the timescales planned. Current learners are making better progress and at advanced level, learners' progress is satisfactory.
- Learners develop good skills in care and expand their knowledge and understanding of care procedures and medication protocols. Most learners improve their written and spoken communication skills and take a pride in their written work. They grow in confidence during their training and some learners have moved to more responsible roles at work as a result.
- Learners' understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work is satisfactory and learners feel safe. Assessors regularly check learners' understanding of workplace health and safety and of how to keep residents safe.
- The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. Assessors inspire learners and give them motivating encouragement. They make good use of their vocational expertise to give learners effective and sensitive coaching sessions at work to develop learners' skills. Learners enjoy these sessions, which are scheduled effectively, to meet their individual needs.
- Assessors carry out learners' assessments flexibly and sensitively, with careful consideration of care homes' work schedules. However, assessors' feedback, following these assessments, gives learners insufficient information on what they need to do to improve. Assessors do not always set sufficiently specific and detailed targets for learners following assessment or during their progress reviews.

- Until recently, initial assessment was weak. Assessors did not use it effectively to identify learners' skills and learning needs or to plan a sufficiently detailed and realistic individual programme to guide their training and assessment. WP has begun to make better use of initial assessment with learners but it is too soon to see its full impact on learners' progress.
- Westward Pathfinder's partnerships with employers are strong and in many cases have been developed and maintained over time. Employers value assessors' up-to-date knowledge and understanding of residential and community work. WP staff understand the aspirations of staff working in residential homes and support them well to raise standards of practice with service users.
- Assessors provide satisfactory care, guidance and support for learners at the start of, and during, their programmes. Assessors are flexible and responsive to their requests for additional guidance or help.
- Leadership and management of provision are satisfactory. Assessors and managers communicate with one another well to exchange information and ideas and keep up to date. Internal verification is satisfactory.
- Westward Pathfinder promotes equality and diversity satisfactorily and has provided suitable training in equality and diversity for staff. However, learners' understanding of these topics, although satisfactory, is sometimes superficial. WP does not have a clear strategy for promoting training in care professions to men.
- Westward Pathfinder's quality monitoring and improvement processes are informal and do not provide sufficiently detailed information for self-assessment. Westward Pathfinder has no formal process for enabling employers to provide feedback. It carries out too few quality checks on processes or on documents in learners' files. Some documents are incomplete and the quality of the information they contain is not consistently high.

What does Westward Pathfinder need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that target setting and feedback for learners are sufficiently specific and detailed and provide them with information on what they need to do to improve and progress.
- Improve the quality and use of initial assessment to plan individual learning programmes for learners and help them make better progress.
- Develop and implement strategies to encourage more men to participate in training in care professions.
- Develop mechanisms for monitoring the quality of provision to enable staff and employers to contribute more effectively to self-assessment and action planning for improvement.

Information and communication technology

Grade 3

Context

24. Westward Pathfinder currently has 48 learners in information and communication technology (ICT) who are taking information technology user qualifications (iTQ). Of these, 15 are working at foundation level, 28 are at intermediate level and five are at advanced level. Approximately equal numbers of men and women are enrolled. Learners attend classroom-based sessions at WP's learning centres in Exeter, Taunton or Torquay. All are working towards iTQ in order to improve their employability.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. In 2010/11, the proportion of learners gaining a qualification at intermediate level was high at 84%, and five percentage points above the national rate. At foundation level in 2010/11, the proportion of learners gaining the qualification was satisfactory and just above the national rate of 65%.
- Learners' progression from foundation to advanced level, and into work, is satisfactory. During the current year, a small number of learners has progressed to advanced level. Westward Pathfinder is successful in retaining learners on programme; a high proportion of those who began their programmes in 2011/12 has remained in learning.
- The standard of learners' work is satisfactory, and some is good. Learners gain confidence and competence in a variety of computer applications and are well motivated and responsive in their learning sessions. They enjoy developing their skills and most make satisfactory progress in achieving their qualifications.
- Learners understand and use safe working practices satisfactorily during their ICT training sessions. Tutors give them effective encouragement to take regular breaks from working at their computer screens.
- The quality of provision in ICT is satisfactory, as it is for teaching and learning. Tutors are knowledgeable, encouraging and support their learners well and with enthusiasm. They give very effective demonstrations of computer applications to help individual learners gain new skills. However, they make insufficient use of questioning to check learners' understanding, to provide challenge, or to develop learners' problem-solving skills.
- Tutors make good use of resources to support individual learning. However, they are over reliant on the workbooks developed for learners to use in their individual sessions to guide the development of their skills. Classrooms are spacious but tutors make insufficient use of the space available for a wider range of activities such as small group work.
- Tutors do not prepare sufficiently detailed or helpful individual learning plans for learners. Although their unit achievement is recorded, learners do not have

sufficiently clear objectives or records of their progress in working towards these units. Some learners make slow progress during their sessions.

- The courses offered by WP meet the needs and interests of learners satisfactorily. Westward Pathfinder gives learners clear information on the progression routes available to them. If a particular IT application is not included in their qualification, learners are able to take appropriate individual unit qualifications if they wish.
- Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Tutors make satisfactory use of discussion on learners' previous experience and their aspirations to guide them to suitable courses. They give learners additional numeracy and literacy support if learners need to improve these skills. Learners who are at risk of late completion of their qualifications are given the opportunity to be fast tracked.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. The manager for this area is recently appointed to the post and has yet to make, or establish, changes. Managers monitor learners' progress adequately and support those who are at risk of falling behind. However, they make insufficient use of data to help identify areas for improvement in provision.
- Equality and diversity arrangements are satisfactory. Westward Pathfinder keeps detailed information on any additional support that learners might need. It has a wide range of adaptive technology available to support learners with disabilities. However, equality and diversity are not well promoted in sessions and learners' recall of topics raised in induction is patchy.
- Westward Pathfinder routinely collects feedback from ICT learners and acts on their suggestions for improvement. For example, it has improved some of its learning materials. However, WP's other quality systems are too informal to secure improvements. Its most recent self-assessment report provided insufficient information on the quality of teaching and learning.

What does Westward Pathfinder need to do to improve further?

- Develop tutors' skills in using a wider variety of learning activities and questioning to enable learners to progress more rapidly and confidently in sessions.
- Plan individual programmes for learners to include clear session objectives that can be used by tutors and learners to plan and monitor their progress.
- Develop and implement quality systems, especially for the quality of teaching and learning, to secure improvements in provision.

Information about the inspection

25. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's business manager, 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 funding body, previous inspection reports, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
26. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of learners and employers. They also looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed for the provider. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)
Westward Pathfinder
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	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners			
Full-time learners		48	96
Part-time learners			
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Capacity to improve	4		
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	3		
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	3		
How well do learners progress?	4		
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	3		
How safe do learners feel?	3		
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	3		
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	3		
Quality of provision	3	3	3
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	3		
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	3		
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	3		
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3		
Leadership and management	3		
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	3		
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	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?	3		
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	4		
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	3		

*where applicable to the type of provision

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