

Positive Outcomes Ltd

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53948

Name of lead inspector: Robert Hamp HMI

Last day of inspection: 27 August 2010

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Positive Outcomes Ltd (PO) is an independent training provider established in 1997. The company offers apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and Train to Gain programmes in information and communication technology (ICT), retailing, commercial and enterprise and business administration and law. Its ICT provision was not inspected.
2. PO contracts directly with the Skills Funding Agency and offers training in all nine government office regions. This represents 95% of its training income. Approximately 65% of learners are female, and approximately 10% of learners are from minority ethnic groups.
3. The company's head office and administration functions are in Mansfield. Since the previous inspection the company has expanded its training provision from 450 learners in 190 companies to 1,270 learners in 519 companies. A managing director is responsible for the provision supported by a team of 10 managers including three regional training managers and a quality manager. PO employs 61 full-time staff and does not work with other providers to deliver its training.

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2008/09
Employer provision:	
Train to Gain	609 learners
Apprenticeships	819 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Grade 3
	Grade
Outcomes for learners	3
Quality of provision	3
Leadership and management	3
Safeguarding	3
Equality and diversity	3
Subject Areas	Grade
Retailing and wholesaling	3
Business administration and law	3

Overall effectiveness

- The overall effectiveness of PO training provision is satisfactory. Overall success rates for apprentices are satisfactory. Success rates for learners completing in planned timescales are low but improving. PO has satisfactory arrangements to monitor learner progress. The quality of teaching, training and learning is satisfactory. Staff work effectively with employers to ensure their in-house training is aligned to national qualifications to meets the needs and interests of learners. Arrangements to assess learners at work are efficient, well planned and flexible. Directors and senior managers provide effective leadership to promote ambition and raise expectations for learners and staff. Staff have relevant knowledge and experience and are well motivated. Safeguarding arrangements for learners are satisfactory. Learners report that they feel safe and protected from abuse. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However managers are not systematically measuring the achievement of different groups of learners. PO has an underdeveloped user engagement strategy. The self-assessment process and report are satisfactory.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates for all apprentices have demonstrated a rising trend over the last three years and are satisfactory. The success rate for apprentices completing within planned timescales is currently low. The success rate for advanced apprentices completing in planned timescales is in line with the national average.
- Train to Gain learners completing in their planned timescales have improved from a low base and remain low. Overall success rates for Train to Gain learners are in line with national rates and are satisfactory.
- Learners develop their work-related skills well. Learners increase their employability through partnership working in the voluntary sector and through apprenticeship opportunities created by PO. Apprentices extend their background knowledge and skills by undertaking a wide variety of tasks at work which increases their confidence and motivation.
- Good use is made of technology by PO staff to support learning and assessment. Learning resources are well designed and contextualised for each area of learning. Assessment arrangements are well planned and flexible. Learners benefit from regular visits in the workplace at times to suit their shift patterns. However, the observation of teaching and learning is underdeveloped.
- Formal progress reviews are ineffective and lack rigour. Short and long-term targets are not discussed sufficiently. For a small number of learners, reviews are undertaken via the telephone and are not effective. Employers are not sufficiently involved in the training and review process.
- Partnership working is good. PO is working effectively with external agencies to provide apprenticeship opportunities for learners and to provide qualifications for volunteers in the local community. The range of provision meets the needs of learners well.
- Support for learners is overall satisfactory but good in retail. Learners benefit from staff who have good industry experience and knowledge. Learners speak positively about staff and how they motivate and inspire them and take time to understand their individual needs. Learning programmes are developed effectively to maximise the individual needs of each learner.
- Strategic leadership of the company is good. Leaders and managers have created a positive and open culture that promotes ambition and encourages teamwork. Internal and external communications are good. Good use is made of data to improve outcomes for learners by managers and staff. Management of staff performance at all levels is effective. Operational management is satisfactory.
- Arrangements for safeguarding meet current legal requirements. All staff have received recent safeguarding training and have been Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked. Health and safety is promoted well, but arrangements for carrying out risk assessments and the vetting of work placements for young apprentices are insufficiently rigorous.

- Learners receive useful information on equality and diversity in the early stages of their programme. However, the promotion of equality and diversity is not undertaken systematically and learners' understanding is variable. Outcomes for different groups of learners are not sufficiently monitored and analysed.
- The self-assessment report is broadly accurate, but does not sufficiently engage staff, learners and employers in the process. The quality improvement plan is monitored closely and has clear actions.

What does Positive Outcomes need to do to improve further?

- Continue to maintain the close monitoring of learner progress to improve success rates for learners within planned timescales.
- Improve the formal review of learners' progress by involving and including the learner and employer to ensure short and long-term targets are clearly understood.
- Improve arrangements for vetting and risk assessing placements for young apprentices to enhance learners' safety.
- Ensure that staff promote learner awareness of equality and diversity and safeguarding during progress reviews.
- Further develop the monitoring and analysis of the outcomes of different groups to ensure that all learners achieve their potential.
- Formalise the involvement of learners, employers and staff in self-assessment and quality improvement processes to improve the quality of provision.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- flexible training that fits my work
- really friendly assessors
- the workbooks and training discs which have really helped me
- knowing how far I am through my programme at every visit
- having deadlines to get my work done.

What learners would like to see improved:

- allocated time at work to get my work done
- my manager to be more involved and more understanding
- more focused equality and diversity training
- quicker responses to my queries.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors**What employers like:**

- that Positive Outcomes are good at what they do
- the training adviser fits in with working routines
- the staff are improving in confidence and skills
- helping volunteers to move into paid employment
- free training for my staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more information about the qualification
- copies of learners' development plans
- more off-the-job training
- a list of contacts at Positive Outcomes in addition to the training advisers.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

5. PO has satisfactory capacity to improve. A clear strategy, successful restructuring and good communication underpins the company's ambitious targets for the future. Success rates have improved steadily over the past three years and are in line with national averages. Improvements are evident in most of the key challenges identified at the last inspection. Self-assessment is generally accurate but is not sufficiently inclusive. Action plans are clear, specific and measurable and monitored closely. Internal verification is comprehensive. However, the observation of teaching and learning is underdeveloped. Staff generally have a good knowledge of the industry, but few have training qualifications.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

6. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates for all apprentices have demonstrated a rising trend over the last three years and are satisfactory. Success rates for apprentices completing in planned timescales have been below national averages for the last two years and are currently low at 41%. Success rates for advanced apprentices completing in planned timescales have been better than national averages for the last three years and are currently slightly below the national average for 2008/09.
7. Train to Gain learners completing in planned timescales have improved from a low base and are currently five percentage points below the 2008/09 national average. Overall success rates for Train to Gain learners have improved and are currently in line with the 2008/09 national average.
8. Learners enjoy their training, are gaining in confidence, taking on more responsibility and progressing well at work. Some learners are able to increase their employability through apprenticeships created by PO and through partnership working in the voluntary sector. The standard of learners' work is generally good.
9. Learners have a satisfactory understanding of health and safety and adopt safe working practices. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. However, the promotion of equality and diversity during reviews is not consistently applied. Learners confirm they feel safe from harassment and bullying.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

10. Teaching, training and assessment are satisfactory. Learners gain good practical knowledge and skills in the workplace. PO staff make good use of technology to support learning. Staff have appropriate occupational expertise and qualifications, but very few have teaching or training qualifications. As recognised by PO, four members of staff have recently successfully completed the preparing to teach in the life long learning sector (PTLLS) qualification. The observation of teaching and learning is underdeveloped.
11. Initial assessment is satisfactory. Learners benefit from a comprehensive three-stage induction process. The results of initial screening for literacy and numeracy are used effectively to plan learning. Analysis of occupational skills is used well to identify appropriate training modules to meet learner needs. Learners receive an effective individualised action plan to confirm achievement and identify next steps after every visit.
12. Assessment practice is satisfactory. Assessment of learners' performance at work is efficient, regular and planned flexibly to accommodate shift patterns. Technology is used particularly well to capture assessment activity. Learning resources are well designed and specific to the learners' programmes. Good use is made of technology to provide learners with a variety of additional learning opportunities relevant to their work role. The standard of learners' work is good. In the better apprenticeship portfolios evidence for key skills is linked clearly to the occupational area with detailed and interesting assignments.
13. The review of learner progress is satisfactory. PO uses ICT well to monitor learners on programme. All learners have a very good awareness of their progress and managers monitor learner progress effectively. However, formal progress reviews are ineffective. Formal reviews focus too rigidly on a series of closed questions. Employers are not actively involved in progress reviews and learners had very little recall of their reviews. For example, some employers reported receiving copies of learner reviews by email and learners reported having reviews over the telephone.
14. The range and content of programmes meets the needs and interests of learners well. PO has worked effectively with a number of national employers to align in-house training to national qualifications. Learners benefit from reduced duplication of activities and a more efficient process. Well-designed training modules improve learner knowledge and performance in line with the needs of the employer.
15. Partnership working is good. The company has a positive commitment to develop partnership working. For example, it has recently established a relationship with Barnardo's on their Future Jobs Scheme for the long-term unemployed. Learners benefit from a six month employed-status placement where they develop useful skills and knowledge of the retail industry with the opportunity to gain a qualification. PO is working effectively with Connexions to

find, recruit and place 16-18 learners onto apprenticeship programmes. PO is also working successfully providing qualifications to volunteers in the local community.

16. Care, guidance and support for learners are overall satisfactory but good in retail. Learners benefit from useful booklets that inform them of the latest legislation relating to employment rights and responsibilities, health and safety and equality and diversity. Learners value the regular visits from staff which they find highly motivational and inspiring. Staff take time to ensure the individual development of each learner and provide them with a personalised learning programme.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

17. Strategic leadership of the company is good. Leaders and managers have created a positive and open culture that encourages teamwork and promotes ambition well. PO has had good recent success in identifying and providing new apprenticeship opportunities in a wide variety of business sectors. Learners benefit from on-going support to maximise sustainable job outcomes. Internal and external communications are good. Managers and staff make good use of data at meetings to enhance learner progress and staff speak positively about the benefits gained from regular meetings and briefings. Management of staff performance at all levels is effective. Staff development is satisfactory with regular opportunities for standardisation. Operational management is satisfactory.
18. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory. Appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures underpin PO's safeguarding practices. All members of staff are CRB checked and an appropriate central register records relevant staff details. All staff have undergone very recent training in safeguarding. The designated officer responsible for safeguarding across the company has undertaken enhanced training. PO is aware of local children's boards and other external agencies but links have not been established. Health and safety is monitored well and learners feel safe. However, arrangements for carrying out risk assessments and the vetting of work placements for young apprentices are insufficiently rigorous.
19. The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. PO promotes a positive culture of mutual respect throughout its organisation. Learners receive relevant employment rights and responsibilities information and cover aspects of equality and diversity through a useful equality handbook. The handbook is a good introduction to equality and diversity within the workplace and refers well to recent legislation in user friendly language. It is used well at induction to engage learners in thinking about equality issues, but is not fully utilised to reinforce equality and diversity during the programme. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is variable. Both learners' and staff profiles generally reflect national profiles by ethnicity. Staff training in equality and diversity is

satisfactory. PO monitors the recruitment of different groups of learners appropriately, but does not sufficiently monitor and analyse their outcomes. Identification of gaps in the achievement between males, females and minority ethnic groups has not been sufficiently addressed.

20. PO is in the early stage of implementing its learner involvement strategy. Feedback from learners and employers gathered through the review process is used informally to identify and address concerns. However, the information is not collated or analysed sufficiently to inform wider improvements. Learners and employers are unable to evaluate the provision systematically. The company is in the early stages of exploring an on-line learner forum to encourage greater learner engagement.
21. The self-assessment process is satisfactory. The process takes sufficient account of staff views expressed in their regular meetings. The company's quality improvement plan is an active document, which is closely monitored with clear action plans that are appropriately specific and time bound. The report is reasonably accurate, although it does not cover some aspects of provision sufficiently such as safeguarding and equality and diversity. Learners' and employers' views do not formally inform the process.
22. The provision represents satisfactory value for money. PO has good resources for teaching, training and assessment. Adequate plans are in place to ensure more staff gain a relevant teaching qualification.

Subject sector areas

Retailing and wholesaling

Grade 3

Context

23. Currently 300 learners are on retail programmes of which 170 are female. Of these 56 learners are on Train to Gain, 230 are training for apprenticeships and 14 for advanced apprenticeships. Thirty five learners are from minority ethnic backgrounds and 28 have additional learning needs. Most learners work in large and medium sized retail organisations; a few work in the voluntary sector. Training and assessment is carried out mainly in the workplace.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Overall success rates for all apprentices and for those completing within planned timescales are improving. Success rates for Train to Gain learners completing within planned timescales have improved from a low base but remain low. The majority of current learners are making satisfactory progress.
- Learners are very motivated and enjoy learning. Many learners have increased their confidence and improved operational retail skills during training. Learners in the voluntary sector on the Future Jobs Scheme acquire a sense of self-worth and increased self-esteem and are keen to continue their training.
- Learners feel safe and adopt safe working practices. In a few cases voluntary learners have progressed from work placement into full-time employment. Others learners have taken on increased responsibilities including promotion at work.
- PO staff make good use of technology to support learning. ICT is used effectively to show learners how well they are progressing during training. Learners appreciate the high quality support they receive from training assessors who provide very good support for learners needing extra help. For example, helping develop learners' reading skills.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Assessors have a good rapport with learners, positively encouraging them to achieve their training targets. They use a wide range of assessments and effectively question learners to confirm their competence. For example, technology is used well to record evidence of shop floor displays.
- Target setting is generally satisfactory. However, short-term targets can be too general and not sufficiently clear for learners to plan thoroughly for the next stage in their training.
- Employer involvement in training is inadequate. Employers are not sufficiently involved in learners' training programmes. Employers state they would appreciate more information about their responsibilities and the content of

learners' training programmes. In particular, helping to set targets during progress reviews.

- The provision meets the needs and interests well. Learners particularly like the way in which they are able to choose NVQ units that fits into their work or a particular work-related interest. They also appreciate the flexible training and assessment arrangements at times to suit them. Where appropriate, learners are encouraged to complete additional units and key skills above the qualification requirement.
- PO works well with a number of retailers delivering specific training for their particular business needs. Employers speak positively of the productive partnership working that has increased learner motivation and improved productivity. PO has good partnerships with voluntary sector retail organisations promoting work-based learning well.
- Support for learner is good. The results of initial screening for literacy and numeracy are used effectively to plan learning. Learners value the regular visits from staff which they find highly motivational and inspiring. Staff take time to ensure the individual development of each learner and provide them with a personalised learning programme.
- Most learners have a satisfactory understanding of equality and diversity. Appropriate use is made of equality and diversity handbooks to reinforce understanding at the start of their training. However, reinforcement of equality and diversity is not undertaken systematically throughout the programme.
- Leaders and managers promote high expectations amongst a mainly new training team. The retail team speak positively about the supportive and committed culture within PO to raise standards and achievement. Data are used well by staff to track all stages of learners' progress. The self-assessment process is broadly accurate in monitoring and evaluating performance. In particular, clear plans are in place to increase achievements within the planned timescale.

What does Positive Outcomes need to do to improve further?

- Ensure short-term targets are clear enough to show all learners what they need to do to progress on to the next stage of their training.
- Continue to develop the equality and diversity handbook so that both staff and learners have a better awareness of current legislation and issues.

Business administration and law

Grade 3

Context

24. PO provides apprenticeships in business administration, business management and customer service from intermediate through to higher level. Currently 872 learners are on programme of whom 561 are apprentices at intermediate and advanced level and 311 learners are completing NVQs on Train to Gain. Customer service is the largest programme with 349 learners. Around 32% of learners are men and 9% are from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Key findings

- Success rates for apprentices across all programmes are satisfactory. Success for learners completing within planned timescales on intermediate and advanced levels in business administration is satisfactory. However, success in planned timescales for intermediate and advanced learners on management and customer service is below the national average. Progress amongst some learners is slow.
- Learners develop good workplace and social skills. Some learners are progressing well in the workplace and are taking on more responsibility, such as supervisory and junior management roles, often managing other learners. Many learners are making good progress and are on their third and in some cases fourth qualification.
- Learners enjoy their learning. Many gain in confidence and demonstrate a strong sense of personal achievement and pride. Learners feel safe and develop good awareness of safe working practices.
- Training, assessment and learning are satisfactory. Staff make good use of technology to support learning and assessment. Assessment visits are well planned and flexible. Tracking of learner progress is good. Learners have a good understanding of the percentage completion of their qualification. However, the process is very assessor led with insufficient learner contributions.
- Formal progress reviews are unsatisfactory. Progress reviews do not focus sufficiently on developing the learner in their job and employers are not involved. Training advisors provide key skills support in the workplace but do not hold a literacy or numeracy teaching qualification.
- Learning programmes meet learner and employer needs well. Learners are able to choose from a variety of optional units that best suit their job role. Employers value the flexibility of the training advisors who plan their regular visits around the learners' work schedules. The matching of learners to qualifications is good and good use is made of voluntary work to prepare for employment.
- Partnerships with employers and training consortia are effective. PO works well with a wide variety of organisations from small family-run businesses to

national high street organisations to benefit learners and the wider community. For example, many learners are involved in charitable enterprises organised by their employer.

- Support for learners is satisfactory. Staff are highly motivated and promote a positive culture of learning. Staff are flexible and approachable and ensure that learners' support needs are met. Initial assessment is satisfactory and is used well to identify learners' additional support needs.
- Learners' appreciation of equality and diversity is mixed. Learners make good use of an equality and diversity handbook during induction. However, the promotion of equality and diversity at reviews is inconsistent.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Lines of communication are clear and staff feel effectively supported. Recent changes to the organisation have given staff a stronger sense of purpose and motivation to improve achievements and outcomes for learners. The internal verification programme is robust. Staff have good industry and occupational experience but very few have teaching or training qualifications.
- Staff were involved in the self-assessment process but are not familiar with action plans recommended in the final report. Some employers do not feel adequately involved in improving the training provision.

What does Positive Outcomes need to do to improve further?

- Encourage training advisors to engage further with learners by widening their training methods to include more coaching.
- Accelerate the pace of staff development so that all staff not only have an initial qualification in teaching/training but are also working towards higher levels.
- Further increase staff involvement in the self-assessment process so that they are fully aware of the final outcomes and resultant targets.

Information about the inspection

25. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, 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 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding bodies, the previous inspection report, 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. They looked at questionnaires learners and employers had recently completed on behalf of the provider. They also observed assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from two programme subject areas the provider offers.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Positive Outcomes**

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
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	1191	1191
Overall effectiveness	3	3
Capacity to improve	3	
Outcomes for learners	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?	3	
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2	
How safe do learners feel?	3	
<i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	n/a	
<i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	n/a	
Quality of provision	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?	2	
How well partnerships with schools, employers, community groups and others lead to benefits for learners?	2	
How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to achieve?	3	
Leadership and management	3	3
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2	
<i>How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?*</i>	n/a	
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?	3	
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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