

West Yorkshire Learning Consortium

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 58514

Name of lead inspector: Ian McMillan HMI

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Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. West Yorkshire Learning Consortium (WYLC) was established in December 2003. The consortium has traditionally worked to develop the skills and interests of the community and the voluntary sector within the region. It works with over 700 employers in its wider consortium role. WYLC started to deliver its first Train to Gain contract in 2008 and it subcontracts all the training and assessment within the contract to four subcontractors.
2. In the early part of 2010 WYLC reorganised its provision significantly and most of WYLC's staff are new. The consortium employs five people who work from its head office in Leeds. WYLC is led by a director and supported by four members of staff. They are responsible for business planning, quality monitoring of the subcontractors and the organisation and development of the provision. The work of WYLC is overseen by a board of trustees consisting of 12 members.
3. This inspection focused on WYLC's Train to Gain provision in business, administration and law. WYLC also has a small number of learners who are working towards childcare, and information and communication technology qualifications. Inspectors sampled aspects of the provision in other subject areas during the inspection. This is WYLC's first inspection.
4. WYLC delivers its programmes through an employer-responsive training contract with the West Yorkshire Skills Funding Agency. Around 85% of WYLC's income is through this contract. Learners are recruited from across the West Yorkshire region which includes areas of relative prosperity as well as areas of high deprivation. The make-up of the population in these areas is similarly varied and diverse.
5. The following organisations provide training on behalf of WYLC:
 - ATL
 - Digitalife
 - Acorn
 - Anissa

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2009/10
Employer provision: Train to Gain	40 learners

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
Aspect	Grade	
Outcomes for learners	3	
Quality of provision	3	
Leadership and management	3	
Safeguarding	3	
Equality and diversity	3	
Subject Areas	Grade	
Business, administration and law	3	

Overall effectiveness

6. Provision is satisfactory. Over 80% of learners complete their programmes successfully but too many fail to gain their qualifications within the agreed timeframes. Learners increase in self-confidence and develop good work-related skills, such as better use of the telephone and more effective use of computer software.
7. Learners enjoy their assessment and learning sessions. However, training and assessments are not always well organised and there are insufficient resources available to make learning more interesting and challenging. Assessors provide learners with useful support to help them progress and to keep them well motivated. They prioritise safety appropriately and encourage safe working practices.
8. WYLC offers a suitable range of qualifications. Childcare learners are working towards the higher-level qualifications they will need to secure their employment in the sector. WYLC provides qualifications flexibly to meet learners' and employers' needs. The consortium has extensive links with other partnerships and local employers but needs to develop these links to ensure the programmes meet the local and regional skills agenda.
9. WYLC monitors the work of its subcontractors carefully and closely scrutinises learners' progress. Action plans are in place with subcontractors to ensure that more learners complete their training programme within the agreed timescales.

WYLC is aware that it needs to develop more robust quality improvement arrangements to reduce the variations in standards and the inconsistencies in practices across the consortium. The consortium has worked hard to develop its learner engagement strategy but needs to do more to engage learners and employers fully in organisational development and improvement planning.

Main findings

- Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. The number of learners who achieve their qualification is satisfactory. Some learners achieve additional qualifications, for example a certificate in equality and diversity. Learners are effectively motivated to succeed and enjoy their learning. However, too many learners fail to complete their qualifications within the planned timeframes.
- Learners develop good employability skills and over the last two years a good proportion of learners achieved vocational qualifications relevant to their job role. The standard of learners' work is generally satisfactory and learners quickly gain the confidence to apply new skills at work. However, the quality of the work in learners' portfolios varies significantly across the provision.
- Learners feel safe. WYLC's subcontracting consortium partners and employers satisfactorily prioritise health and safety in the workplace. Learners have a clear understanding of workplace requirements for health and safety and they adopt safe working practices. They fully understand their roles and responsibilities. They demonstrate a good awareness of e-safety measures.
- Individual learning plans and learners' visit reports are satisfactory. They set clear long-term targets for qualification completion. However, the plans do not always note the development of learners' broader employment aspirations or their short-term progression aims. Visit reports often lack detail about what learners need to do to next.
- Teaching and training are satisfactory. Assessors provide good support that promotes learning and motivates learners. However, across the provision there is insufficient development or use of learning resources, such as information technology or other subject specific course information to make learning more interesting and to support the progress of the more able and motivated learners.
- Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Assessment visits are generally productive and assessors plan them well to minimise disruption for learners and employers. However, some training sessions and assessments do not take full account of the learning and training completed at work.
- WYLC satisfactorily matches its provision to meet the needs of employers and learners. The four training subcontractors successfully promote wider learning opportunities to WYLC's learners. However, employers, learners and other partners are not sufficiently involved in the review, design, evaluation and development of the provision.
- Care, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory. Learners value the good support provided by their assessors which motivates them. They benefit

from effective mentoring by their assessors and good signposting to other support agencies. However, the application of this support and the provision for advice and guidance is variable across the consortium.

- Arrangements to safeguard learners are satisfactory. WYLC provides a safe and respectful learning environment for learners. Learners know whom to contact should they need to share any concerns.
- The consortium has adequate arrangements to monitor and promote equality and diversity. It has started to collate the relevant data but has not used this information to establish a focused action plan to narrow the variations in achievement across all programmes.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Recent effective action by the WYLC management team has established a clear focus on improvement across the consortium and improved general communications between all parties. However, some aspects of quality improvement are immature, including self-assessment and focused actions to reduce inconsistencies.

What does WYLC need to do to improve further?

- Ensure more learners complete successfully within agreed timescales by using individual learning plans to set better short-term targets and through the provision of more detailed feedback to learners about their progress.
- Ensure that assessors discuss learners' work-related training, learning and development during progress visits and assessment activities and that this information, where appropriate, is used more effectively to support qualification progression.
- Develop more resources to support the development and improvement of teaching and learning. These should include resources that are directly relevant to learners' occupational areas.
- Develop better ways to engage learners and employers and to consult with other local and regional partners to support quality improvement and programme development.
- Ensure more consistency in the provision of information, advice and guidance across the consortium through better promotion and more widely available advice about career options and further training.
- Establish more consistency and raise standards across the consortium by improving and extending quality improvement arrangements. Introduce more focused action planning to reduce inconsistencies and variations in outcomes, improve the use of data and information to create more challenging self-assessment across the consortium, and implement observations of more key learning processes.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- the individual support they receive from WYLC staff
- the way assessors are flexible and make progress easier
- gaining new skills to develop their job prospects
- good opportunities to learn while at work.

What learners would like to see improved:

- more learning support resources that link to the job role and qualification.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the help and advice given to their staff by the assessors
- being able to discuss and review their organisational training and development needs
- the quick response to resolving any issues
- the approachability and dedication of the assessors.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more recognition of the training and development they do at work.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 3

10. WYLC has a satisfactory capacity to make and sustain improvement. The new management team has quickly established a good focus on continuous improvement across the consortium and prioritised the need to ensure more learners complete within agreed timescales. Assessors support learners well. WYLC has started some development work with all its subcontractors to raise their effectiveness through capacity building and organisational development. Overall success rates are satisfactory and broadly in line with national rates. An increasing number of learners in 2010 have successfully completed within agreed timeframes.
11. Self-assessment is slowly becoming an improvement tool across the consortium. WYLC is aware of the need to reduce further the inconsistencies in standards and practices across the provision. Learners' views are collected and used to inform changes but this is not routine across all programmes. More work needs to be done to engage employers in the development and review of programmes. The report identifies most of WYLC's development needs.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 3

12. Outcomes for learners are satisfactory. Over the two-year period since the organisation was established, WYLC has maintained its success rates broadly in line with the national rate. Timely success rates were below the national rate in 2008/09. They have improved throughout this year but too many learners still complete outside their agreed timescales. Current learners are making satisfactory progress towards completing their qualification. Learners enjoy their learning programmes and they are keen and motivated to succeed. The standard of work in the majority of learners' portfolios is satisfactory. However, the quality of the portfolios varies between the subcontractors.
13. Learners develop good work-related skills to improve employability and promotion prospects. These include enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem, better use of the telephone, more effective use of computer software, and improved understanding of work practices and procedures. Childcare learners are working towards the higher-level qualifications that they need for future employment in the sector. They acquire new skills and knowledge, such as the appropriate use of displays in the nursery, which directly benefit the children in their care.
14. Learners feel safe. They are clear about their responsibilities regarding health and safety and they demonstrate a good awareness of e-safety measures. Staff promote health, safety and equal opportunities satisfactorily during training, and routinely check learners' understanding in reviews.

The quality of provision

Grade 3

15. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Assessors provide good practical support and they work very effectively with learners to provide individual support in the workplace. They display good levels of commitment and energy. Learners speak highly of the work of accessible and highly approachable assessors, which motivates them to succeed. Learners value the group training offered.
16. Assessment practices are satisfactory. Assessment visits are frequent, generally productive and take place at times to suit learners and employers. However, many of these sessions are insufficiently structured and learners are not always aware of the planned outcomes or the purpose of the assessment visits. Learners receive appropriate training in the workplace to develop their work skills. In the better programmes, particularly in childcare and customer service, assessors liaise well with employers to discuss learners' progress and employees' training needs. However, they do not always record the training on learners' individual learning plans or use it well to support progression.
17. Learners are aware of their long-term achievement targets which assessors record appropriately on their learning plans. However, assessors do not always promote or record learners' broader employability skills development and more focused short-term aims. Arrangements to ensure that all learners and employers are aware of the progress learners make, and what they still need to do to complete, vary considerably between assessors and subcontractors. Assessors do not use a sufficient range of resources in their work to add variety and extend learners' skills and knowledge.
18. WYLC provides a satisfactory range of programmes to meet learners' and employers' needs. Arrangements for training and assessment are sufficiently flexible. The subcontractors offer learners a range of additional programmes including health and safety, literacy and numeracy and hygiene qualifications.
19. Working relationships with a range of training providers and voluntary agencies are positive, productive and of benefit to learners. Partnerships are well developed and integral to the mission of the organisation. However, the partners are not sufficiently involved in the review, design, evaluation and development of the provision.
20. Satisfactory arrangements are in place to identify learners' literacy, numeracy and additional needs. Advice, guidance and support for learners are satisfactory overall. WYLC successfully promotes advice and guidance with some learners through, for example, a tailored additional support package. In administration many learners benefit from effective mentoring from their assessors. However, arrangements vary in quality across the subcontracted provision.

Leadership and management

Grade 3

21. Leadership and management are satisfactory. In a short period, WYLC has improved arrangements to communicate with all subcontractors through the introduction of productive six-weekly meetings. Individual monthly meetings with subcontractors focus on developing quality improvement arrangements and more closely monitoring and challenging organisational performance. WYLC's board of trustees provides good general support to the consortium's director but the board is aware of the need to provide more leadership and direction. Further work needs to be done to improve standards and levels of consistency, but the consortium is focused and ambitious.
22. Arrangements for safeguarding and equality of opportunity are satisfactory. All staff have attended appropriate safeguarding training. The consortium effectively promotes safe practices. Assessors satisfactorily reinforce learners' knowledge and understanding of health and safety and safeguarding matters throughout their programme. Trainers are qualified assessors and they have gained or are working towards a teaching qualification.
23. WYLC takes satisfactory steps to promote equality and diversity. It provides learners with a safe and respectful learning environment. The reinforcement of equality during reviews is satisfactory. Learners know how to obtain help or support if they need it. Learners from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in training programmes that meet local needs.
24. WYLC has widened participation successfully through its development of new programmes in care and through its work with employers in the community and voluntary sector. WYLC satisfactorily monitors the performance of all learners. It recognises the need to develop more focused action plans with its subcontractors to narrow the variations in achievement across programmes.
25. The consortium has extensive links with key voluntary, community and other regional partnerships and employers and it works well with these organisations to support their training needs. However, employers, learners and other organisations that benefit from the work of the consortium are not sufficiently involved in the review, design, evaluation and development of the provision.
26. WYLC's self-assessment process and quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory. WYLC's first self-assessment report accurately identifies many of the consortium's development needs. It is aware of the work needed to establish more consistency and to raise standards across the provision and is working well to establish these attributes quickly. WYLC uses accurate data successfully across the organisation to monitor learners' progress. The training director scrutinises the performance of all subcontractors on a monthly basis and is quick to respond and support subcontractors who fall behind agreed expectations. Staff across the provision are encouraged and fully supported to develop and improve their own performance.

27. Recently introduced observations of teaching and training have identified variations in practice. Action plans agreed with the subcontractors are in place and quality monitoring visits are planned. WYLC has satisfactory audit processes that identify and resolve issues of non-compliance effectively. However, current quality improvement arrangements do not include the observation of wider learning processes, the monitoring of the effectiveness of support interventions and the evaluation of the broader impact of the Train to Gain programmes on employers. WYLC secures satisfactory value for money.

Information about the inspection

28. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and one additional inspector, assisted by the provider's director, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plan, comments from funding bodies and data on learners and their achievement since programmes started.
29. Inspectors used individual interviews, telephone calls and emails. They looked at policies and procedures, and 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)**West Yorkshire Learning Consortium**

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

Grades using the 4 point scale 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners		
Full-time learners	0	0
Part-time learners	40	40
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?	3	
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?	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	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?	4	
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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