

Economic Solutions Ltd (Skills Solutions)

Inspection report

Unique reference number: 53233

Name of lead inspector: Ian McMillan HMI

Last day of inspection: 29 June 2012

Type of provider: Independent learning provider

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Information about the provider

1. Manchester Solutions (MS) is the trading name of Economic Solutions Ltd (ES). Economic Solutions is a group of companies that includes Skills Solutions and Work Solutions. ES is an independent learning provider based in Manchester which also provides employment and business programmes. The MS Group employs around 1200 staff of whom around 170 are trainers, assessors, specialist learning support staff, and managers working directly to support the delivery of ES's programmes. This inspection focused on the work of Skills Solutions and their apprenticeship and adult training programmes and the foundation learning provision. Of the nine subject areas offered by ES, two were inspected: retail and commercial enterprise (hairdressing) and preparation for life and work (preparation for work, foundation learning). Subcontractors deliver some of the off-the-job training for the apprenticeship and adult skills programmes. In addition, ES subcontracts around 12% of its whole provision to a small network of providers.
2. Adult provision has decreased since the previous inspection; however, apprenticeships for adults and young people have increased. MS has also increased its community-based provision to support its foundation learning and employment programmes. MS contracts with the Greater Manchester Skills Funding Agency. Government-funded training accounts for approximately 25% of MS's overall business. At the previous inspection, all grades were good except for capacity to improve, equality and diversity and safeguarding which were satisfactory. All subject area grades were good. MS has continued to expand and broaden its provision over the last few years. Part of this work is to meet Government priorities and to support local and regional employment and regeneration needs.
3. The following organisations provide training on behalf of ES:
 - Active Synergy Development Services Ltd (Adult skills training)
 - Astral Training Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - CPL Training Group Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - D & M Training Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - Dutton Fisher Associates (Apprenticeship training)
 - GTG Services Ltd (Adult skills training)
 - Norman Mackie & Associates Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - North West Safety Services Ltd (Adult skills training)
 - JMWCO 92 Ltd (Adult skills training)
 - Paramount Training Group Ltd (Adult skills training)
 - RFA Associates Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - Kiernan Construction Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
 - PCT Healthcare (Adult skills training)

- SB Training (UK) Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
- South Cheshire Services Ltd (Adult skills training)
- South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
- Standguide Ltd (Apprenticeship and adult skills training)
- Timpson Ltd (Adult skills training)
- Accent Regeneration and Community Partnerships Limited (Apprenticeship training)
- Accrington and Rossendale College (Apprenticeship training)
- Alliance Learning Limited (Apprenticeship training)
- Barking & Dagenham College (Apprenticeship training)
- Bolton College (Apprenticeship training)
- Bradford College (Apprenticeship training)
- Burnley College (Apprenticeship training)
- Bury College (Apprenticeship training)
- Chesterfield College (Apprenticeship training)
- Gateshead College (Apprenticeship training)
- Hopwood Hall College (Apprenticeship training)
- Kirklees College (Apprenticeship training)
- Knowsley College (Apprenticeship training)
- Lambeth College (Apprenticeship training)
- Liverpool Community College (Apprenticeship training)
- The Manchester College (Apprenticeship training)
- North West Training Council (Apprenticeship training)
- The Oldham College (Apprenticeship training)
- Practical Refrigeration Training Centre (Apprenticeship training)
- Preston College (Apprenticeship training)
- Rochdale Training Association (Apprenticeship training)
- St Helens College (Apprenticeship training)
- Salford City College (Apprenticeship training)
- SETA Training and Advisory Services Limited (Apprenticeship training)
- South Birmingham College (Apprenticeship training)
- Stockport College (Apprenticeship training)
- Simian Risk Management Limited (Scaffolding record scheme)

- Tameside College (Apprenticeship training)
- Trafford College (Apprenticeship training)
- Utility and Construction Training Limited (Apprenticeship training)
- Walsall College (Apprenticeship training)
- Wigan & Leigh College (Apprenticeship training)
- Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust (Adult apprenticeships)
- Tracey Powell: Trading name: The Learning Curve Partnership (Adult skills training)
- East Cheshire Trust (Adult apprenticeships)
- Antony for Hair Partnership (Apprenticeship training)
- Bobbles (Apprenticeship training)
- Celeste Arnold Hair and Make Up Ltd (Apprenticeship training)
- Hair Razors (Apprenticeship training)
- House of W (Apprenticeship training)
- Lewis-Flack Training Ltd (Adult apprenticeships)
- Pierre Alexandre (16 – 18 year old apprenticeships)
- Razor 34 (Apprenticeship training)
- Razors Edge (16 – 18 year old apprenticeships)
- Terence Paul (Apprenticeship training)
- Kaplan Financial (Apprenticeship training)
- University Hospital of South Manchester NVQ Academy (Apprenticeship training)
- Greater Manchester West Mental Health Foundation Trust (25+ apprenticeship training)
- Reform Hair & Beauty (Apprenticeship training)

Type of provision	Number of enrolled learners in 2011/12
Provision for young learners: Foundation Learning programmes	423 learners
Employer provision: Adult skills programmes Apprenticeships	516 learners 3,100 apprentices

Summary report

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

Overall effectiveness of provision	Grade 2
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Capacity to improve	Grade 2
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	Grade
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	2
Equality and diversity	2

Subject Areas	Grade
Hairdressing	2
Employability training, foundation learning	2

Overall effectiveness

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good. Most learners complete their programmes successfully and gain their qualifications within the time planned for their completion. Learners develop good skills and confidence in their chosen sector subjects and are prepared well for further study or for employment. Many hairdressing learners progress to higher levels in training and at work. Foundation learners gain a good range of vocational qualifications.
5. Learners enjoy all aspects of their training sessions and are taught well in their practical and theory lessons. Tutors make good use of a range of teaching methods and new technologies to involve learners and help them learn new skills. However, ES is aware of the need to develop more creative and innovative teaching strategies to support learning. ES offers an outstanding range of qualifications to enable learners to progress to higher level awards. It provides these flexibly, to meet the needs of both learners and their employers, and provides them with good coaching and support during their programmes. Support for learners on foundation learning programmes is particularly effective.

6. ES makes good use of its partnerships with employers, schools, strategic partners and other subcontracting training providers to offer courses that enable learners to participate in vocational education and training. It adapts its training successfully to meet learners' needs.
7. Directors and operational managers at ES carefully monitor the quality of learners' training and the progress learners make. They take appropriate and effective action when they identify the need for improvements. Staff support their learners well and are very responsive to their changing needs. They make good use of learners' feedback and information on the quality of provision is gathered effectively by managers and staff to self-assess and prepare development plans. However, employer views are not used in sufficient detail in ES's self-assessment report.

Main findings

- Success rates for learners are good. The overall success rate in hairdressing, particularly at advanced level, has improved and is now well above the national rate. Foundation learners achieve well and many progress into work or further training. However, success rates at intermediate level are satisfactory and for foundation learners employment progression opportunities are insufficient.
- Learners develop good skills and knowledge in their chosen subjects. Hairdressing apprentices gain good practical and customer care skills. Plumbers and service engineers develop good diagnostic skills. Foundation learners gain valuable qualifications and improved levels of confidence. The promotion of health and well-being and the benefits of community work is satisfactory in lessons and learner reviews.
- Career opportunities for apprentices across all areas are good. Many learners gain promotion at work and a good proportion of learners progress onto higher levels of study.
- Teaching and learning are good. In theory sessions, tutors use practical activities and teaching resources well to involve learners, encourage their independence and develop their confidence. Tutors' checks on the learning taking place are satisfactory. Resources for practical training at the hairdressing academy are outstanding and tutors provide good individual coaching during practical sessions. The recording of progress targets during learner reviews is insufficient.
- Learners' initial assessment is thorough but tutors do not sufficiently use this information to plan training and match assessment to the individual needs and circumstances of learners. Although assessors are highly responsive and help learners to progress through their awards, in hairdressing learner progress logbooks do not sufficiently record or account for learners' current ability levels.
- ES has outstanding arrangements to meet the needs of learners, employers and the sectors it serves. It contributes significantly to meeting regional skills development and regeneration. ES is highly responsive and works effectively to provide vocational pathways and progression opportunities for all age ranges. It

provides a very responsive and extremely wide range of vocational and foundation programmes.

- Support arrangements are good and benefit learners' progress. In foundation learning, the outstanding support provided is a key feature of the high achievement rates and levels of learner satisfaction.
- Managers set clear targets for staff and learner performance and monitor these carefully. Staff are well informed of developments across the organisation. ES's managers are aware of the need to increase staff development opportunities to introduce more creative and innovative teaching and improve staff skills in order to meet the needs of different, and sometimes more challenging, learner groups.
- Managers make good use of feedback from learners, the observation of teaching, learners' progress reviews, and accurate data on programme performance to support staff as they prepare a suitably detailed and accurate self-assessment and quality improvement plan. However, ES's self-assessment report does not provide sufficient detail of employer views or a clear evaluation of the quality of learning drawn from its observation process.
- ES's arrangements for safeguarding learners are good. It carries out extensive monitoring of all its partners and subcontractors and has detailed guidance for staff and learners. Senior managers provide significant commitment and implement detailed arrangements to secure the safeguarding of vulnerable adults.
- Equality and diversity arrangements are good. ES's commitment to widening participation and targeting local areas to improve participation rates from under-represented groups is excellent. It monitors performance data carefully to identify any achievement gaps and responds quickly where appropriate. ES recognises that the promotion of equality and diversity within the curriculum is an area for improvement.

What does ES need to do to improve further?

- Improve the speed at which learners' progress, particularly at intermediate levels. Make better use of the information gained following initial assessment to support the planning of learning and introduce more progression opportunities into work for foundation learners.
- Improve the standard of teaching and learning by increasing the amount of staff training and through the introduction of more innovative use of resources and creative learning strategies.
- Make better use of learner progress reviews and logbooks to record attainment by including more detailed and helpful information on the progress learners make and any agreed improvement actions.
- Develop and implement strategies to ensure a more consistent approach across all programmes to the promotion of health and well-being, equality and diversity and the benefits to be gained by learners from participating in community work.

- Improve the quality improvement arrangements by using the views of a wider range of employers and through the increased emphasis on improving learning as well as teaching through the evaluation of lesson observations.

Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors

What learners like:

- having assessors and tutors who have been practitioners
- the very good resources and facilities
- the way tutors support them to succeed and progress
- the individual support they get on the foundation learning programmes
- the additional qualifications and the development of new skills on apprenticeship and adult training programmes.

What learners would like to see improved:

- smaller groups in the hair academy
- easier access to drinking water in sessions.

Summary of the views of employers as confirmed by inspectors

What employers like:

- the way ES supports the local and regional business community through its courses and partnership working
- the flexibility of ES staff in meeting employers' needs and the needs of their learners
- the extra confidence that the training and qualification gives learners in the workplace
- the good support and communication from ES staff.

What employers would like to see improved:

- more information from assessors about learners' academic progress.

Main inspection report

Capacity to make and sustain improvement

Grade 2

8. ES's capacity to make and sustain improvements is good. Success rates have improved since the last inspection. Overall success rates on apprenticeships and timely success rates on adult skills programmes are now above their respective national rates. Foundation learners achieve well. Teaching and learning are good, and provision is well managed at all levels. Strengths identified at the previous inspection have been maintained and most areas for improvement have been rectified. ES's effective action improved its quality improvement arrangements. Managers provide clear direction, monitor programme performance closely and support staff to enable them to offer an expanded range of provision to meet local needs, and aid participation and inclusion. ES is aware of the need to improve areas of underperformance across the organisation and improve its observation process to concentrate more on learning than teacher performance.
9. ES's self-assessment process is inclusive and makes good use of data, other management information and feedback from learners. Managers monitor the quality of provision closely using a suitable range of quality assurance processes. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in the provision. ES's quality improvement framework includes clear plans for improvement that are implemented effectively. ES is aware of the need to include sufficient detail of employer views in self-assessment.

Outcomes for learners

Grade 2

10. Outcomes for learners are good. Following ES's last inspection in 2009, overall success rates on apprenticeship, adult skills programmes and foundation learning improved. Intermediate programmes have improved but not as well as advanced courses where success rates are now very high. Increasingly, learners complete their programmes on time. Current learner progress is good and retention rates are high.
11. The development of learners' skills across all programmes is good. Hairdressing learners develop good practical skills in colouring, cutting and blow-drying, and on building services courses they gain good fault finding and diagnostic testing skills. Foundation learners on functional skills courses improve their communication and number skills and gain confidence. Learners generally make good progress during their programmes and they feel safe. Vocational and foundation programmes are highly focused on skills development and employability and learners are significantly better prepared for employment or further study. However, some progress reviews are not effective and tutors rarely use the information gained through the initial assessment results in planning to meet the learning needs of individuals; too many learners do not progress sufficiently quickly. Most learners make progress and achieve

regardless of any particular group to which they might belong including learners with additional learning needs.

The quality of provision

Grade 2

12. Teaching, training and assessment are good. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. In the better sessions, tutors plan the practical and theoretical activities well to involve all learners. Tutors ensure learning sessions include interesting activities and demonstrations. Information learning technology (ILT) is increasingly being used to make learning more interesting and teaching more effective. Some tutors use good questioning techniques to gauge learner understanding and encourage learners to share their personal and work experiences. Tutors in foundation learning use their good understanding of learners' complex support needs and barriers to learning to develop and improve their behaviour and conduct. However, tutors in this area do not sufficiently challenge the more-able learners to extend their knowledge. Across all programmes there is insufficient creative or outstanding teaching. For example, in the less effective learning sessions, there is insufficient planning and use of initial assessment information to ensure individual learner needs are met. In some sessions, the tutors' information handouts to learners and the learners' written notes are poor.
13. Trainer/assessors regularly visit learners in the workplace at convenient times for learners and employers. During these visits, trainers review the progress of learners and assess their work satisfactorily. They agree the tasks which learners need to carry out and ensure they have a clear understanding about what they need to complete before the next visit. Assessors are highly responsive and flexible in accommodating learners' assessment. However, the clarity and detail recorded in the review and the training and assessment records for apprentices is too variable. Initial assessment is effective and includes a diagnostic assessment of learners' literacy and numeracy levels. Tutors and trainers satisfactorily support learners with literacy and numeracy support needs. The promotion of equality, diversity and health and well-being through teaching, learning and assessment is generally satisfactory but not systematic.
14. The provision meets the needs of learners and the community exceptionally well. ES offers a wide range of programmes in nine vocational areas at foundation, intermediate, advanced and in some areas at higher levels. These awards are closely aligned to the employment opportunities in the region. As a subcontractor of Bolton University, ES provides a foundation degree in administration, management and health and social care. ES also offers a comprehensive range of qualifications and programmes in employability, personal and social development and functional skills at 10 centres in Manchester, Salford, Trafford, Tameside, Rochdale, Stockport, Liverpool and St Helen's. It has developed two large and well equipped training centres in Manchester, one providing qualifications and training in construction and engineering and the other in hairdressing. These centres meet the diverse

needs of the learners and employers exceptionally well. A significant number of employers, including some large engineering companies use the facilities regularly to improve the skills for their employees, for example, to improve the expertise of their factory maintenance staff. Nearly all learners attend a good range of enrichment activities that develop their team working skills and self-confidence.

15. ES works effectively and productively with schools, employers, strategic partners, stakeholders, and other training providers to develop and deliver a provision that benefits learners. Partners are used effectively to promote opportunities for employment, training and apprenticeships. ES is working closely with a number of awarding bodies to develop new provision for learners and the industrial and commercial sectors it serves. ES uses its partnerships well to provide good work experience for its foundation learners. A good proportion of learners progress to higher levels, particularly on hairdressing and business programmes.
16. Overall, ES's arrangements to provide personal support, advice, and guidance for learners are good. The support provided on the foundation learning programme by the specialist support team and the foundation skills training staff is outstanding. Learner outcomes and retention rates across most programmes have improved. Learners with additional learning needs often achieve as well or at higher rates than other learners on the same programme. However, ES is aware of the need to better promote the support it can provide for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). ES uses its hardship fund well to support learners who are at risk of homelessness, in poor health or have other personal issues, to stay in learning.
17. ES has invested in a small fleet of mini-busses to provide learners with free transport to and from its training centres from various locations in the area. ES works well with local agencies to intervene and support unemployed learners who are at risk of leaving their course before completion. ES has appointed a small, dedicated support team who are well trained and will eventually coordinate and monitor the effectiveness of support interventions across the organisation.

Leadership and management

Grade 2

18. Leadership and management are good. Leaders and managers have established highly effective strategic partnerships with a range of organisations to enable learners to participate in training, promote inclusion of learners at risk of exclusion at school, and to extend the local curriculum offered to young people. Managers are highly responsive and work closely with local schools and partner training providers and colleges to provide flexible learning courses for learners across all age ranges, often enabling them to remain in education, gain qualifications and progress to further training. ES has highly effective strategic and business planning that accounts for regional and national trends and skill needs and uses a complex range of funding streams to provide opportunities

for learners and employers. ES works very effectively with local authorities to contribute to local skills and development projects and is, for example, playing a lead role in establishing construction apprenticeships jobs and training during the regeneration of Manchester's Town Hall.

19. Managers at all levels provide clear direction and support for staff through effective target-setting, good programme and staff performance monitoring and excellent lines of communications. Staff make good use of the opportunities provided for them to develop their skills. ES has recognised the need to adapt and further develop its teaching and learning strategies in order to meet the needs of different, and sometimes more challenging, learner groups. Plans for the development of provision to make greater use of ILT and e-learning are well established. Staff are well motivated and enthusiastic about the difference that their provision can make to the people they work with.
20. Safeguarding arrangements are good. Since the previous inspection, ES has introduced a good range of improvements to its safeguarding arrangements for learners. It has introduced a range of professional guidelines for staff to ensure they deal consistently with any disclosure by learners. These new arrangements include detailed guidelines linked to lone working for staff, social networking considerations and special considerations for staff and learners working alone or in remote places. ES's safeguarding steering group includes organisational directors and closely scrutinises all aspects of policy and implementation planning. Safeguarding officers are in place at every training centre and academy. ES provides training for all its subcontractors, and all subcontracting organisations' safeguarding arrangements are carefully monitored, and risk assessed each year.
21. ES holds a central list of checks on all staff who have contact with learners and all have had certificated training in child protection. ES provides staff and learners with good information and guidance on safeguarding and child protection and has new arrangements in place to secure the safeguarding of vulnerable adults. It carries out thorough health and safety checks and risk assessments of its employers' premises and takes appropriate action if learners are at risk of harm, including taking learners out of employment and finding new employers. It provides learners with training in health and safety and internet safety. Training to improve learners' understanding of topics such as sexual health and personal well-being is variable across programmes.
22. ES's arrangements to widen participation and monitor equality and diversity are good. ES ensures all parties use or adopt good equality and diversity and employment practices. It provides suitable information and training in equality and diversity for learners, but follow-up promotion in lessons is insufficient. Learners' understanding of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection ES has improved how it monitors the performance of different groups of learners. Positive actions have been taken to increase the proportion of under-represented learners. These include projects to recruit apprentices from schools with high levels of minority ethnic pupils. The

proportion of learners from the minority ethnic community has increased over the last three years. Learners with additional learning needs are as successful as other learners on the same programmes. ES has identified the need to improve its promotion of the support available for those with language support needs and also to better promote equality and diversity in lessons.

23. ES's quality framework and self-assessment process are effective in securing change and engaging staff and learners in improvement planning. It regularly collects feedback from learners but the use of employer feedback to support improvements is underdeveloped. Managers make good use of a wide range of management information and learner progress data to monitor the performance of all programmes and intervene when the information identifies learners at risk of falling behind.
24. Staff at ES are highly responsive to learner and employer needs, and contribute well to the evaluation of the vocational and employability programmes. ES's quality improvement team carry out annual observations of teaching and reviews. Their reports are evaluative and provide good feedback to individuals on how they might improve. However, observations concentrate too much on teacher performance with insufficient emphasis on the evaluation of learning. ES has invested extensively to improve its provision, including electronic teaching and learning resources, new community-based provision and in the outstanding resources in hairdressing. ES provides good value for money.

Subject areas

Hairdressing

Grade 2

Context

25. ES provides apprenticeships and adult skills programmes in hairdressing and barbering. These programmes are provided in partnership with employers. Learners attend training sessions at ES's Manchester city centre academy and at employers' premises. Twenty one adult learners and 551 apprentices are enrolled on courses.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. Overall success rates have improved over the last three years and are now good. In 2011/12, intermediate apprenticeship success rates improved to around the national rate. Success rates for advanced apprentices in 2011/12, which represent around half of all learners, are outstanding at 93%. Current learners are making good progress and retention rates are high.
- Learners gain good practical hairdressing and barbering skills required for their qualifications, particularly in techniques including cutting, colouring and blow-drying. Learners work confidently when dealing with customer needs and applying advanced salon techniques using creative and complex procedures. ES is aware of the need to ensure more intermediate apprentices complete their training and assessment work within the agreed timeframes.
- Learners are encouraged to take part in additional activities and gain additional awards and many take this opportunity. Learners who attend the academy also provide hairdressing services for a local care home. However, most learners are not involved in community activities as a feature of their training.
- Progression rates are good. Around one quarter of all apprentices progress from intermediate to advanced training programmes. Employment and career opportunities are good. On completion, learners often progress to junior stylist posts in their salons.
- Learners feel safe and they enjoy their training. They have a good understanding of health and safety and safeguarding issues and know who to speak to if they have any problems or concerns. However, the promotion of healthy living is poor. There are no structured arrangements to raise learners' awareness of their personal health and well-being.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers motivate learners well to attain good standards and skill levels. Practical individual skills coaching and mini-demonstration sessions are highly effective. In theory lessons, teachers use a good range of teaching methods and increasingly use ILT to make lessons more interesting. The integration of equality and diversity in lessons is insufficient.
- Assessment arrangements are highly flexible and responsive and well planned to meet learner and employer needs. However, learners' assessment logbooks

do not sufficiently record all the aspects of assessment that have been completed or record in sufficient detail learners' current ability levels.

- Learner progress reviews are productive and fully evaluate all aspects of learners' work. Verbal feedback to learners by tutors is very good. However, tutors' written records of these meetings often fail to demonstrate the quality of discussion or the detail learners and employers need to be aware of around set progress targets and timeframes for completion.
- ES meets the needs and interests of users well. Employers and learners benefit well from good provision that is flexible and provides excellent opportunities to progress to higher levels. Additional short courses, visits to exhibitions and specialist product courses are popular and well attended. ES is very responsive in meeting employer-training needs.
- Partnership links with employers and local schools are highly productive and benefit learners particularly well. Hairdressing programmes take place in over 300 employer premises. ES's provision in a local school has supported the improvement in school attendance rates. ES has established a strong commitment to training, skills development and investment in resources from employers.
- Care, guidance and support arrangements are good. Many learners have additional support needs that are quickly assessed and met. New induction arrangements are good and are very effective in allowing learners to familiarise themselves quickly with teaching and learning resources and meet ES's specialist support staff. Guidance on progression is good and learners routinely progress and succeed at higher levels.
- Leadership and management are good. Managers challenge all identified underperformance by carefully monitoring staff and programme performance and actively involving learners and staff in self-assessment and quality improvement. The outstanding resources benefit learners providing them with an excellent learning environment. Well managed resources in centres situated in prime locations give good access to training opportunities across the area.

What does ES need to do to improve further?

- Improve the speed of learners' progress, particularly on intermediate hairdressing programmes through more regular logging and use of information on learner progress to plan for additional assessment and support where required.
- Improve lesson planning to better promote learner awareness of equality and diversity in salon activities and increase their awareness of healthy lifestyles, personal well-being, and how they can make a positive contribution to the community.
- Improve the recording of learners' progress targets at reviews through better use of clear, measurable and specific actions so that those who are able to complete their courses earlier can do so.

Preparation for work, foundation learning

Grade 2

Context

26. Over 400 learners attend foundation learning and employability training programmes at 10 training centres. Participation rates and the number of training centres have increased over the last two years. ES has located its centres in some of the most deprived wards in Greater Manchester. Access to the programmes is open throughout the year; there is no minimum entry requirement. Many learners start the programme with few, if any, qualifications and most have low levels of attainment in mathematics and English.

Key findings

- Outcomes for learners are good. The achievement of key objectives improved from 76% in 2010/11 to a high of 88% so far in 2011/12. All learners who access the programme were previously not in education, employment or training. These and other learners attend regularly. ES closely monitors absenteeism and retention and achievement rates are good.
- Learner progression rates are satisfactory. Learners progress into good destinations, including further education and employment. Personal development is significant; learners develop a strong work ethic and they enjoy their programme. Work placements improve learners' confidence and self-esteem. However, ES is aware of the need to improve progression rates and more effectively promote a wider range of progression opportunities for work and further training.
- Learners feel safe, they demonstrate safe working practices and are aware of whom to contact if they require help. An excellent safeguarding poster designed by foundation learners is now used to promote safeguarding across the organisation. Health and well-being are promoted well throughout the programme and learners are encouraged to discuss any issues or concerns with staff.
- Learners make a good contribution to the community through their involvement in a range of activities, for example, carrying out a litter pick in the local area and improving canal towpaths. The foundation skills tutors work closely with a number of organisations to provide community, youth work projects and volunteering opportunities for learners.
- Teaching and learning are good. Learners achieve well on the programme including qualifications in mathematics and English. Tutors who use new technologies well and are skilled in ensuring all learners benefit and participate in sessions, provide the most effective learning. However, insufficient use is made of information gathered at initial assessment to plan learning.
- Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Tutors are appropriately qualified and have good experience of working with young people with emotional and behavioural needs. Learner progress reviews are completed in sensitive and respectful manner and are effective in gauging learner progress, motivating

learners to do better and noting any follow-up action needed to support learning.

- The provision is outstanding at meeting learner needs and interests. Work placements closely match learners' career aims or their future training plans. Enrichment activities are extensive and contribute particularly well to learners' enjoyment and development of personal and social skills. Many learners start the programme with significant barriers to employability and progress into work or further training.
- Partnerships with employers, Connexions, schools and community groups are good and lead to improved outcomes and opportunities. ES works effectively with mental health agencies, substance misuse support groups, local hostels and youth offending teams to support its own learners and encourage participation in foundation learning from young people who are at risk or not in education, employment or training.
- Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Tutors quickly establish a comprehensive knowledge of learners' individual personal needs and use this information particularly well to motivate and ensure learners achieve and progress well. Specialist staff deal with learners' complex support needs sensitively and promptly. Work-placement officers are very skilful in matching learners to employers and provide highly effective support.
- Programme management is good. Learners benefit from good teamwork and effective communications between tutor/assessors, learners and employers. Targets are set for every learner, and managers closely monitor and share information across the team about programme performance. Resources are good, tutors are well qualified and there is significant investment in staff development. Staff are appropriately engaged in quality improvement.

What does ES need to do to improve further?

- Improve the high achievement rates of key objectives through developing further the good progress monitoring arrangements, learning strategies and excellent support arrangements.
- Increase the proportion of learners who move into work and/or further education or training by exploring, establishing and promoting a wider range of appropriate progression routes and opportunities.
- Improve how tutors plan for and meet individual learner needs through more effective use in lesson planning and teaching sessions of the information gathered through the initial assessment process.

Information about the inspection

27. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the provider's apprenticeship 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 funding bodies, the previous inspection report and data on learners and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.

28. 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 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)
Economic Solutions Ltd (Skills Solutions)
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	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive	Employer responsive
Approximate number of enrolled learners				
Full-time learners	516	423	93	0
Part-time learners	3355	0	255	3100
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2	2
Capacity to improve	2			
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2	2
How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2			
How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2			
How well do learners progress?	2			
How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2			
How safe do learners feel?	2			
<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	2	2	2	2
How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2			
How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	1			
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?	2			
Leadership and management	2			
How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	1			
<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?	2			
How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2			
How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	2			
How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2			
How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2			

*where applicable to the type of provision

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