

Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		26-30 November 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- A very high proportion of unemployed learners obtain jobs.
- Apprentices develop high standards of administration, customer service, marketing and management skills in the workplace, and the confidence to apply them to different settings.
- Assessors and managers work together, setting high standards for apprentices to meet.
- Group training sessions are well designed.
- Particularly strong partnerships offer good opportunities for learners.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The arrangements for observing teaching and learning do not always lead to training which is consistently at least good and often outstanding.
- Too many apprentices fail to complete in the time expected.
- Trainers and assessors do not promote equality and diversity consistently or meaningfully in training sessions and reviews.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the consistency of good and outstanding teaching by training all trainers, including those in subcontracted provision, sharing good practice, and improving the arrangements for observing teaching and learning so that they more clearly identify particularly good teaching practice and areas for improvement.
- Ensure that more apprentices complete their programmes on time by monitoring their progress, and intervening with extra support when apprentices show signs of falling behind.
- Train trainers and assessors about the challenges to equality and the benefits of diversity in the workplace, so that they can be more confident and consistent about promoting equality and diversity to learners in training sessions and reviews.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outcomes for apprentices are good. Overall success rates have improved steadily for three successive years and continue to be just ahead of the national average. However, overall success rates for the health and social care programme, which is no longer recruiting learners, are very low. Not enough apprentices in any subject complete their programmes in the time expected. Outsource Vocational Learning (OVL) is aware of the reasons for apprentices' slow progress, and has improved its arrangements to monitor and intervene where necessary. ▪ Outcomes for unemployed learners are good. More than 60% of the learners on the new employability programme gain sustainable employment, and 72% of the young people not previously engaged in education, training or employment gain apprenticeship places. All learners gain an accredited qualification at level 1. ▪ Employability learners' enhanced employability skills include: curriculum vitae writing; interview skills; time management; internet based research to enable them to find out about potential employers; better verbal communication skills; and a general increase in confidence. Learners bring their improved communication skills, knowledge about the employer, and confidence to interviews, and so succeed in gaining employment. ▪ Apprentices develop good administrative, customer service and managerial skills, including handling bespoke databases and managing conflict. Supervisors value the apprentices' improved skills and interest in their work. In some cases, assessors have helped apprentices develop projects which have been of real business benefit. Apprentices enjoy their learning, and the opportunity to reflect on it. ▪ Female apprentices are less likely to complete their qualification in the expected time than male learners, but the difference between male and female results is reducing. Little difference exists between how well disabled and non-disabled apprentices perform. White apprentices are more successful than those from ethnic minority backgrounds, but the difference is decreasing. However, a more noticeable difference can be seen in the speed at which apprentices from different backgrounds complete their qualification. White apprentices are considerably more likely to complete in time than the apprentices from other ethnic backgrounds, and the difference is increasing. ▪ Learners develop good skills in teamwork and dealing with customers. They gain a greater understanding of why they perform tasks in a certain way, and learn to adapt their communications for different audiences. They learn how to present themselves in the workplace, and gain enormously in confidence. They take on more responsibilities, for example by being promoted from billing operative to billing controller. Apprentices working in high-profile public sector organisations in London developed the confidence to act as volunteers for the Olympics. 	

- Some apprentices gain promotion on completion of their qualification. Those who are on fixed-term contracts gain the skills to apply successfully for jobs either in their host organisation or in other prestigious companies. OVL encourages apprentices to select units for their qualification which will stretch them and help them develop their skills, rather than fitting exactly with their existing job roles.
- Learners on the employability programmes all have a job interview with local employers in the aviation, construction or retail industries who are actively looking to recruit, and most learners get a job that meets local needs.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Good teaching, learning and assessment are reflected in the overall success rates for apprentices and the job outcomes on the employability programme. Most current apprentices are catching up well on previous slow progress and making good progress towards achievement since the recruitment of new trainers and assessors. However, the changes have not yet had a full impact and too many apprentices are still behind target.
- Staff set high expectations and motivate learners very effectively throughout their learning in both apprenticeship and employability programmes. OVL works very well with prestigious employers to establish an infrastructure that provides very effective workplace support, with training for mentors and line managers. Nearly all learners benefit from well-coordinated support from trainers, assessors and employers, although a few apprentices at one small subcontractor do not receive the same level of support.
- Learners enjoy the interesting and interactive workshops to develop their understanding of their industries. Employers act as outside speakers to bring authenticity to training sessions. Administration and customer service apprentices improve their skills well in topics such as communications and team work. Employability learners work towards industry-specific qualifications and all learners are well prepared for job interviews.
- OVL is continuing to develop additional high quality learning materials. Workshop resources for subjects such as communication skills are informative and very professionally presented. Apprentices at one small and new subcontractor do not yet have access to the workshops or any of the OVL materials. Staff are appropriately qualified.
- Apprentices benefit very well from good on-the-job training from their employers. They develop job skills to a high standard, become multi-skilled by well-planned job rotation and increasingly take on more responsibilities. A few learners at one small subcontractor do not receive sufficient structured on- or off-the-job training.
- Trainers and assessors provide good one-to-one coaching that meets individual needs very effectively. Employability learners monitor their individual progress in coaching sessions and, in most cases, set relevant and stretching targets in discussion with their adviser. Apprentices benefit from good assessor coaching through workplace visits, often supplemented through the e-portfolio.
- Thorough and sensitive initial assessment informs learning plans well to meet individual needs. Learners work towards a higher-level mathematics and English qualification where their assessment identifies this is achievable. Apprentices, with guidance from their managers and assessors, choose units which will stretch them and prepare them for the next career challenge, rather than just those which match their present role. Where it is identified that learners could achieve an advanced apprenticeship, they are swiftly transferred from their intermediate qualification.
- Feedback from assessors is mostly very constructive and learners understand what they need to do to improve. Short-term action planning is effective. However, in a few instances, feedback is insufficiently detailed to help learners progress.

- Apprentices make good progress in mathematics and English and produce a good standard of work. Employability learners develop good written and verbal communication skills. Workshops are effective, with well-qualified and experienced trainers providing good training and support.
- Information, advice and guidance are good throughout. Employability learners receive good career advice, including input from employer guest speakers who enliven sessions and set high expectations for learners. OVL's contact centre offers relevant and timely initial information. Trainers carrying out exit interviews provide appropriate information about progression opportunities.
- OVL works particularly effectively with employers to help recruit apprentices, designing successful assessment and selection events. They work with employers to attract recruits from non-traditional areas, and prepare learners well for their employment interviews. For example, the contact centre worked with a fire service who wanted to target its recruitment through charities, including specialist charities for burns victims.
- Most learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Trainers embed issues of fairness and inclusion well in most sessions. Most employers have a very strong focus on ensuring learners' welfare has a high priority. Assessors use a bank of questions to check learners' understanding at reviews. However, these questions are not sufficiently inspiring or contextualized for learners' workplaces and assessors do not always sufficiently explore learners' awareness of the different aspects of equality.

Employability training

Good

Other work based learning

- The highly-skilled and experienced trainers work closely with employers to offer a well-designed programme which enables learners to improve their employability skills and, in most cases, gain local employment including apprenticeships.
- Teaching in group sessions is good, and in some cases outstanding. The best sessions are highly motivating and inspirational. Trainers and outside speakers, usually employers, encourage learners by explaining the range of jobs which are available for them and the steps they need to take to gain employment. Learners clearly enjoy group sessions and their presentations exhibit very high standards of both communication skills and knowledge about job interviewing techniques.
- Good support continues after learners have left the programme as they can come back for advice about interviews or job applications. All learners have an adviser so their progress is continuously monitored during individual sessions as well as formal class sessions.
- OVL has designed the programmes well to meet learners' individual needs. All the academies, construction, retail and aviation and logistics, follow the same structure but with different content.
- In the best individual sessions, coaching is good or better, based on accurate identified needs and facilitating independent learning. During most individual sessions, advisers regularly check learners' understanding, give sound advice and set detailed targets. However, in a few cases, targets are not always recorded in sufficient detail.
- Initial assessment is thorough. Adult learners have to be screened, as without a full five-year employment history and a Criminal Records Bureau check, they cannot be employed at the airport. Advisers carry out this screening sensitively.
- Learners generally understand what they need to do to improve. Individual coaching sessions include very realistic and industry-relevant mock interviews where, in most cases, clear feedback and guidance are given. However, not all staff are sufficiently aware of learners' previous employment or educational history and, as a result, their advice is not always pertinent.

- Learners develop good communication skills which they use to perform well at interview. All learners have their literacy levels tested on entry, as the programme is not suitable for learners with literacy levels lower than entry level 3 as the job roles require functional literacy. However, learners who achieve a high entry level 2 are enrolled and receive additional support. The advice for learners with language support needs is not always sufficient.
- Learners receive good career advice and guidance throughout the course. Trainers and assessors maintain a constant focus on gaining employment or an apprenticeship, in group and individual sessions.
- Learners have a clear understanding of equality and diversity from an emphasis on fairness and catering for individual needs in most sessions. OVL has worked with some learners who could not meet the airport's conditions of employment, for example because of a criminal record, gaps in employment history or low levels of literacy. In most cases, the learners were offered interviews and after making full disclosures they received job offers. In a few individual sessions, trainers miss an opportunity to promote equality and diversity issues.

Administration and customer service

Good

Apprenticeships

- Most apprentices are now making good progress, and are using electronic portfolios which easily show apprentices and their assessors whether they are on track to complete on time. This is reflected in apprentices' outcomes, which are good overall, although too many apprentices have made only slow progress previously.
- Staff set high expectations and apprentices are well motivated to achieve and progress. OVL works very closely with prestigious employers to develop a learning infrastructure in the workplace by training apprentices' managers how best to support the apprentice. Workplace mentors and line managers provide excellent on-the-job guidance and supervision and are actively involved in the apprenticeship. A few apprentices at one small subcontractor do not receive such high-level support and encouragement.
- Apprentices enjoy the interactive off-the-job workshops, where they learn about topics such as communication and teamwork, as well as developing independent learning skills. Some advanced level apprentices do not find the workshops sufficiently challenging, but trainers use their feedback well to develop and improve the sessions.
- Employers provide very good training. They use job rotation well to enable apprentices to experience different departments and become multi-skilled. A few apprentices at one small subcontractor do not receive structured training.
- Assessors provide good coaching to meet individual needs, both at visits and remotely via e-portfolios. Apprentices now move promptly through their programme, after a period of slow progress and changes of assessors. Assessors use digital technology where possible to record apprentices' achievements, rather than wasting time writing down what apprentices do. However, too many apprentices are still behind target.
- Effective initial assessment informs individual learning plans well. Employers participate fully in selecting suitable units with apprentices to stretch them and allow development in the workplace, rather than just matching their current job role. Apprentices work towards their key or functional skills at a higher level where initial assessment results identify this as appropriate.
- Nearly all apprentices have a very clear understanding of their programme and progress and their feedback from assessors is constructive and effective. However, in a few cases, apprentices do not get sufficiently detailed feedback.
- Apprentices make good progress in developing their mathematics and English skills. A specialist trainer runs workshops and trained assessors provide one-to-one support. In a few cases, apprentices have used the opportunity to develop numeracy projects which have proved of real

business benefit. For one small subcontractor, assessor training for functional skills is not yet complete.

- A specialist contact centre provides good initial information for potential apprentices and regularly surveys apprentices for feedback on their apprenticeship. Apprentices on fixed term contracts receive particularly good training to find jobs. Where apprentices start an intermediate level qualification, and it is identified they could be working at an advanced level, managers move quickly to transfer them to the higher level.
- Apprentices generally have a good understanding of the equality issues that could affect them in the workplace. Trainers work with good study booklets for equality at induction. Assessors use a bank of questions to check apprentices' understanding at reviews. However, this question bank is uninspiring and not sufficiently contextualised.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Directors and senior managers have set a clear vision and strategy for the company, which is well understood by staff and partners. They have successfully managed substantial recent changes to the business, including a new acquisition and the addition of new areas of work, whilst continuing to improve success rates. They have high expectations for learners and aim to provide qualifications and skills that will enable them to thrive in highly competitive commercial environments. The company's targets are challenging, yet realistic, and staff are clear about their contribution to meeting the goals. The company has recently restructured to improve accountability and has an increased focus on performance management.
- Since the previous inspection OVL has ensured a greater emphasis on teaching and learning with the introduction of a new model of delivery, the addition of off-the-job training in workshops and the appointment of dedicated trainers. Lines of accountability are clear; staff performance is monitored regularly and underperformance is addressed urgently.
- Assessors and trainers have regular graded observations which inform their personal development plans and appraisals well. The company is in the process of developing the current observation system to give shorter notice and to incorporate a greater variety of evidence. It is also aware of the need for further training for managers who observe to ensure greater consistency and to enable them to evaluate the promotion of equality and diversity more confidently.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and involves all staff well. The report makes good use of a range of data and evidence and is honest and self-critical. The management information system manager produces useful data reports for senior managers which inform their action plans and discussions with staff.
- OVL's managers closely monitor and directly sample key aspects of subcontractors' quality assurance processes, including teaching, learning and assessment. Subcontracted staff are included in the self-assessment process and in OVL training events. Nevertheless, a minority of learners in new subcontracted provision does not yet benefit from the same quality of provision.
- The company's contact centre carries out regular surveys for both learners and employers, which lead to action plans to improve provision. However, the data are not analysed to collate responses from different groups or subcontractors.
- OVL works in close partnership with a number of prestigious employers and has a well-established working partnership with Heathrow Airport Ltd through the academies. Its partnership with Heathrow Airport Ltd and Jobcentre has resulted in a pre-employment programme which matches the needs of local unemployed people with those of employers on the airport who cannot recruit enough staff.
- Courses are designed to meet the needs of learners and employers. For example, the employability programme in construction includes the health and safety qualification learners need to go on site, and also qualifications in first aid, fire marshal duties and the use of

abrasive wheels. This means that learners from the construction academy can carry out useful tasks as soon as they are employed.

- A newly appointed manager has responsibility for overseeing programme development, meeting the emerging requirements of employers and ensuring that staff have the skills to offer new provision of the highest quality. In response to demand, the company is currently developing a programme to deliver the Certificate in Policing Knowledge for the Police Forces and a new marketing qualification for the advertising industry.
- OVL analyses the performance of different groups of learners well and has identified actions to address gaps. The significant gaps in success rates between different groups evident in 2010/11 have narrowed in the past year for most provision. The company carries out training in equality and diversity periodically, to inform staff of major changes to requirements, and on an on-going basis through staff meetings and staff newsletters.
- Managers have recently appointed equality and diversity champions who support staff in collecting, developing and sharing materials to promote good practice within training. Inspectors observed equality and diversity integrated well in sessions and reviews, but this was not consistent across the provision. Learners generally have a good understanding of equality and diversity. OVL's contact centre engages in targeted marketing to attract under-represented groups when required.
- OVL meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. There are strengthened links with local agencies to provide extra protection for young people not previously in employment, education or training. All staff have Criminal Records Bureau checks and OVL helps learners to achieve clearance as part of their application for a job at the airport where necessary.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Outsource Vocational Learning Ltd**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	Apprenticeships	Employability
Overall effectiveness	2	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2	2
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Employability training	2
Administration	2
Customer service	2

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Full-time	0	0	0	18	0	15	0	4
Part-time	0	67	0	0	0	0	0	0
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	105	538	29	369	0	24		
Number of learners aged 14-16	n/a							
Number of community learners	n/a							
Number of employability learners	67							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Urban Futures London Ltd ■ Liga (UK) Ltd ■ Drive Assist UK Ltd ■ Elite Assessors ■ Training Platform Ltd 							

Additional socio-economic information

The employability programme is operated in partnership with the five boroughs local to Heathrow airport. Unemployment in these boroughs is around 11%, compared with 9% in the rest of outer London. Pockets of great deprivation can be found in these boroughs, particularly in the areas nearest to the airport.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Jane Shaw HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by one of the two directors as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all of the provision at the provider. Inspectors looked at the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across all of the provision and graded the sector subject areas listed in the report above.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Handbook for the inspection of further education and skills 2012*, Part 2:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/handbook-for-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-september-2012>

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