

Working Links (Employment) Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		11-14 December 2012
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- The number of apprentices who achieve the full framework requires improvement.
- The number of learners who progress to further training, education or employment from the employability programme requires improvement.
- Individual learning planning for apprentices is underdeveloped.
- Not enough of the apprentices are engaged in good learning sessions.
- On-the-job learning lacks structure and employers are not involved sufficiently.
- Leaders and managers have not yet developed the apprenticeship programme to achieve the high standards to which they aspire.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Most apprentices currently on the programme are making satisfactory or better progress.
- Achievements are high in business administration programmes in 2012/13.
- The number of learners who progress from the employability programme has increased significantly.
- Staff support most learners effectively and motivate them to progress and achieve.
- Some of the teaching and learning is good and inspires learners.
- Leaders and managers have an accurate view of what they need to do to improve and have begun implementing improvements to reach high standards.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase the number of apprentices who achieve the full framework by monitoring their progress, providing more support when required and ensuring all aspects of the programme are covered thoroughly.
- Increase the number of learners who progress to further training, education or employment from the employability programme by clearly identifying barriers to progress and developing realistic and achievable plans for overcoming them.
- Improve the way apprentices' learning is planned by better reflecting their individual needs in their plans, their employment context and their job role.
- Extend the amount of good teaching and learning by sharing good practice, by further staff development and by developing sessions that are more engaging, active and interesting.
- Provide more structure for on-the-job learning opportunities for apprentices by considering the tasks and learning opportunities in the workplace and by enabling more employer involvement in the review and planning of learning.
- Develop high standards for the provision by sustaining quality improvement, by closely monitoring the performance of the programmes and by ensuring the quality of teaching and learning is good or better.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Most apprentices are making satisfactory or better progress with a small minority making slow progress. The level of achievements for apprenticeships is improving in 2012/13 and is now satisfactory. The overall apprenticeship success rate in the first year of the contract, 2011/12 was very low.
- The number of learners who progress from the employability training programme has improved from a low base and is now satisfactory with the majority now progressing to further education, training or employment.
- It is too early to judge the significance of any trends regarding success rates of different groups of learners. Based on the provider's own data the success rates for warehousing and hospitality apprentices is much lower than for those in business administration at the time of the inspection.
- Learners participating in the employability skills training programme gain skills, develop self-confidence and learn how to present themselves to employers. The majority who complete the programme achieve certificates in First Aid and Health and Safety. Attendance overall is satisfactory with positive monitoring processes in place to ensure re-engagement.
- Apprentices gain in confidence and increase their knowledge of their working environment. For example they develop a particularly good understanding of how to work safely in a warehouse. They give thorough answers to complete the health and safety workbook.
- Most apprentices complete National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) portfolios and workbooks to a good standard and evidence contained in them endorses learners' development of competence at work.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching learning and assessment require improvement. A start has been made to improve but historically success rates and progression rates have been low and the quality of teaching and learning still reflects this.
- Staff support most apprentices effectively and motivate them to progress and achieve. Learners taking part in employability training benefit particularly from the way staff use their skills and expertise to engage and support them in making progress. However in a minority of cases apprentices did not receive sufficient teaching or assessment and delays prevented them from commencing some aspects of their programme such as key skills. The provider is aware of this and has taken appropriate action.
- Overall teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the good sessions learners benefit from experienced tutors and coaches, who are passionate about supporting learning and achievement and who provide positive role models. Sessions are well planned and include active learning that engages learners well. Independent learning and the development of learning skills are promoted effectively.
- Tutors employ good questioning techniques and reinforce learning and promote confidence building. Learners are inspired and want to learn more. Most learners on the apprenticeship programme gain a satisfactory awareness of their employment rights and responsibilities.
- In sessions requiring improvement the teaching is geared too much to task completion, evidence gathering and passing tests. In some sessions learners are not encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and the process is led and controlled by the assessor. The planning of individual learning for apprentices is under-developed. On-the-job training lacks structure and often assessors do not involve employers sufficiently.
- Progress reviews are not always recognised as such by apprentices and employers are not involved in a way that promotes their engagement in planning learning and contributing to assessment.
- Assessment and initial assessment are satisfactory. Support provided for English mathematics and functional skills is satisfactory. Assessors are appropriately trained and qualified to carry out assessment. Apprentices benefit from feedback from assessors which they find helpful in determining what actions they need to take and confirming what they have achieved. Apprentices benefit from visits from assessors to the workplace and the individual support they are given. Assessment is planned effectively and is provided flexibly in order to meet the needs of learners and of the employer.
- Learning resources are satisfactory overall. Some apprentices extend their learning and, supported by assessors, produce work that is beyond what is expected for their qualifications. In some cases assessors use a good range of technology to support learning. The recent introduction of an electronic portfolio is showing some positive signs of enhancing learners' experience. The resources used for apprentices would benefit from further development. Some teaching resources are too paper based and unimaginative.
- The promotion of equality and support for diversity in teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with very effective promotion throughout the employability training programme. In some cases good use of work based projects with apprentices contributes to developing their knowledge and understanding of diversity. Assessors are appropriately trained to support the development of learners' understanding of equality and diversity. Records of reviews provide evidence of regular reinforcement with learners.
- Advice, guidance and support to help motivate learners to progress are satisfactory with some particularly good features in the employability training programme. However the amount and frequency of advice and guidance specifically to help apprentices to consider progression to higher qualification levels, further training, education and career options requires improvement.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and strategic management are effective. Leaders have a clear view of how programmes aiming to provide skills development and programmes for people who are not in work can merge and be beneficial to individual learners. The contract for apprenticeship provision is new and in its second year. The evaluation by managers of the first year highlighted a number of areas for improvement. As a result managers addressed these directly with suitable actions aiming for high standards of performance but it is too early to see the outcome yet.
- Managers have a clear vision to develop the provision to meet the needs of users and to meet broader government and local agendas. They have worked well to shift the focus of the provision to providing more apprenticeship training and develop staff teams and resources accordingly although more work is required to achieve consistently high standards of teaching and learning across all programmes.
- The operational management of the provision is effective with good communications and a well organised meetings structure. Problems with data in the first year of the contract are now resolved. Data are used well to monitor the progress of learners and the performance of assessors. Learners and assessors, who are at risk of failing to meet learning goals or targets, are identified in sufficient time to enable remedial action to be taken.
- Staff are suitably qualified and experienced and the difficulties of providing sufficient and appropriate staff in the previous year are now resolved. Resources have improved and are satisfactory. The use of portable computers to record progress and interface with the e-portfolios is beginning to benefit learners. This is still being implemented at the time of inspection.
- A sound strategy to improve teaching and learning is underway. Performance managers meet with all assessors each month to review their work and also to complete an observation of teaching and learning. They have recently introduced a new system for completing these observations and managers work closely with an experienced partner to verify, standardise and improve the quality of teaching and learning. It is too early to assess the impact of this strategy.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive and is designed carefully to include learners' views and maximise staff involvement. The self-assessment report is good with critical judgements and an accurate representation of the main strengths and areas for improvement. The different contracts are reported on separately, however there are no self-assessment reports for the individual subject sector areas.
- The quality improvement plan is detailed and identifies the key areas for development. Targets are realistic and managers monitor progress regularly and record their findings in detail for further review. The progress made to implement most of the action points is beginning to show some impact on the current year's success rates.
- Appropriate quality improvement procedures are in place and these include very detailed and thorough procedures to monitor all aspects of the provision. Many of these procedures are very recent and it is too soon to assess their impact.
- Staff aim to manage the provision to meet the needs of individual learners and employers. They make regular use of questionnaires with learners to collect feedback and they obtain further learner views through discussion groups and a learner forum. Managers use this feedback to improve the provision, for example by including additional training sessions into the programmes and improving the resources. The collection of employers' views requires further development. The management of the subcontractors is robust and the contract compliance has now improved.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is given a high priority and all the corporate communications reinforce this message. Working Links strategy to widen participation and work

with under-represented groups achieves success through outreach, which successfully engages young people not in education, training or employment.

- Staff use a variety of ways to promote and check learners' understanding of equality and diversity drawing from a bank of questions relating to equality and diversity, health and safety, and safeguarding. Most learners have a reasonable understanding of equality and diversity. Data are used to identify performance differences between different groups of learners but this has only recently become possible.
- Safeguarding procedures are good and are used effectively. The provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. All staff have been appropriately CRB checked and trained. Assessors introduce learners to safeguarding at induction and discuss it at each review. Learners have a good understanding of safeguarding issues and are aware of the range of external links and resources should they need them. Staff use outside speakers to offer additional training sessions on drug and alcohol awareness, sexual health and healthy living options. Managers check that employers have adequate safeguarding awareness and supply additional posters and information where necessary. Several serious safeguarding issues have been identified and have been resolved very effectively.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Working Links (Employment) Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 Learning programmes	16-18 Learning programmes	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Other work- based learning	Employability	Foundation Learning	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	3				3				
Outcomes for learners	3				3				
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3				3				
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3				3				

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Administration	3

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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Part-time	145	7	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+	
	34	307	1	224	N/A		N/A	
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	N/A							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Single adults skills budget & ESF NEET, Darlington College.							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ LSP ■ Gordon Franks ■ Rathbone ■ Prince's Trust. 							

Additional socio-economic information

Working Links is a national public, private and voluntary partnership formed in 2000. It specialises in the delivery of Welfare to Work programmes. Since 2011/12 it contracts with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) to provide apprenticeships and since April 2011 employability skills programmes for young people not in education, employment or training mainly in the Midlands which is co-funded with European Social Funds. The provision is managed by a skills director, a skills quality manager, two operational managers and a partnership coordinator, along with four performance managers.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Derrick Spragg HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and three additional inspectors, assisted by the Quality Manager 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 although this was limited to the previous year as the contract for apprenticeships is relatively new. 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 area 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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