

Aspire-i Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		14-18 January 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-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:

- Learners' achievement of qualifications and their progression rates vary too much across the partner organisations and too many learners do not complete in the planned time.
- The quality of lessons is too variable. Good lessons engage learners using a variety of activities but too many rely solely on worksheets and technology is not used sufficiently to support learning.
- Fewer than half of all learners have the opportunity to participate in work placements with employers to develop their employability skills within a real work situation.
- Tutors' feedback on learners' written work is neither detailed nor accurate enough to help learners to improve. It does not explain exactly what they have done well and any action they need to take to demonstrate more clearly what they have learned.
- Learners' progress reviews are regular and detailed but do not always include clear and challenging targets to help learners understand what they need to do to improve within specific timescales.
- Managers do not put enough emphasis on monitoring teaching, learning and assessment and providing training to improve how they are delivered.

This provider has the following strengths:

- Learners grow in confidence and in their ability to learn independently, developing skills, behaviour and attitudes such as good timekeeping that increase their chances of future employment and their motivation to take on further training.
- The team of engagement advisers gives learners good advice and guidance that help them stay on the programme. Good support from partners' external contacts helps learners overcome difficulties that may stop them from continuing on their programme.
- Strong leadership, better communication and performance management are beginning to help Aspire-i Limited (Aspire-i) improve the quality of the Foundation Learning programme.
- Planned programmes are delivered flexibly so that learners can study a broad range of vocational subjects and have a choice of delivery partners.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve progression rates and achievement of qualifications across the provision by ensuring that the learning aims, length and delivery of the programme are appropriate to learners' starting points and aspirations.
- Improve the quality of lessons by providing all staff with training on how to plan and deliver sessions that meet the needs of learners of all abilities. Develop good quality learning activities, including the use of interactive electronic technology that can be used by all staff.
- Develop the expertise of staff in setting targets and developing meaningful action plans. Ensure the documentation currently used to record reviews is fully fit for purpose.
- Work with partners to increase opportunities for work experience with employers and increase the number of learners able to access work placements.
- Strengthen quality improvement arrangements to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment to at least good across the partner organisations. In particular, enhance the skills of observers to write evaluative text using a sound evidence base to support judgements, and formalise moderation arrangements to ensure that the recorded evidence has a clear focus on learning and assessment and supports the grades awarded.
- Develop measures to evaluate the impact of improvement initiatives more thoroughly and to reduce the inconsistencies between partners. Include initiatives relating to equality and diversity and actions taken by managers to improve the quality of delivery by the partners.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The overall achievement of vocational and personal-development qualifications is high and improving. However, there are significant differences between partners and subject areas. For example, achievement of sport, leisure and recreation qualifications is high but for health and social care it is low. The sport, leisure and recreation programme is linked to a more selective recruitment policy used by a partner providing an introductory programme for entrants to the armed forces. ▪ The achievement of functional skills has improved significantly since 2010/11 but remains low. The provider's data show slightly higher achievement for mathematics than for English and an improving trend for information and communication technology (ICT) where achievement was previously poor. ▪ The number of learners progressing to further training or work has increased slightly over the last two years. However, this does not present a full picture, as Aspire-i has limited information on the progression of learners. Aspire-i recognises the need for further work to improve the quality of this information. ▪ A small number of learners progress to level 2 qualifications as part of the Foundation Learning programme and this supports their progression into apprenticeships and other training. ▪ Many learners develop their capacity to learn independently but too many fail to achieve their personal aims within the planned timescales. Aspire-i is working with partners to improve this. ▪ The number of learners completing their programme has improved since 2010/11 and the proportion of learners leaving within the first six weeks has reduced and is now very low. However, there are significant variations between partners. 	

- There are no significant gaps in achievement across the provision between male and female learners or between learners from different minority ethnic groups. Support for learners with learning difficulties, including dyslexia, is effective in helping these learners achieve. However, Aspire-i has identified that learners with emotional or behavioural difficulties and those with mental health issues may be achieving less well.
- Learners grow in confidence in their abilities and motivation to develop the social skills, attitudes and behaviour that increase their employability. This includes maintaining regular attendance, using appropriate language and managing anger.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement; this reflects the slow progress and inconsistency of outcomes between partners and across subjects. In the better lessons, tutors use a range of strategies to encourage learners to participate and make good progress. In the weaker lessons the teaching is uninspiring and too reliant on the use of worksheets.
- A few tutors use skilled and effective questioning to check learners' understanding and progress. In too many lessons the range of questions is limited and tutors do not use peer and group assessments to encourage learners' participation and stimulate learning. Tutors' feedback on marked work is mostly poor.
- Vocational resources and settings used by learners are of a good standard and provide realistic experiences for learners. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff use these resources very effectively to help learners gain employability skills and meet their qualification targets. Tutors link vocational practices, theory and terminology skilfully to engage learners and support their understanding.
- Tutors make too little use of information and learning technology to promote learning and increase the variety of assessment methods. Interactive technology is not widely available across the partnership.
- Learners have too few opportunities to participate in work placements with employers. Aspire-i recognises that this is an area for improvement. One partner has good links with employers across vocational areas ensuring that all learners can access work experience. Other partners can provide realistic experiences in practical settings such as construction and motor-vehicle workshops. However, most partners have not developed sufficiently strong links with employers.
- Initial assessments identify learners' support needs and any potential barriers but they are not always used in sufficient detail to plan individual learning. Learners make good progress relative to their low starting points in educational achievement through the continued engagement and support of staff across the partnership. Previous learners now employed by some of the partners act as particularly positive role models for current learners.
- Learners participate in a range of enrichment activities which motivate, captivate their interest and raise their aspirations. In one partner, learners worked with a local art group producing high-quality self-portraits which promoted their self-image and individuality. Other groups develop confidence and a sense of achievement through participating in a challenging outdoor activity.
- Detailed information, advice and guidance are appropriate and tailored to individual needs. Learners receive good advice about progression routes and further opportunities. Engagement advisers are particularly effective in supporting learners, responding promptly to arrange extra care if learners do not attend or face difficult personal challenges. Partners refer learners to their own wide range of highly effective specialist support agencies and teach in small groups in order to give more focused individual support.
- The use of targets does not always support progress well enough. Learners benefit from regular and detailed reviews. However, in too many cases records of aims that have been

completed and activities required for learners to make further progress are insufficiently detailed and lack appropriate challenging timescales. The design of review documentation restricts the amount of detail that can be recorded for generating meaningful action plans.

- Aspire-i celebrates learners' achievements enthusiastically, encouraging them to take part in competitions to identify those who have made particularly good progress. For example, one group of learners achieved an award for promoting safety in a motor-vehicle workshop; they used their analysis of handling high-risk tools to design safety posters for display in their workplace.
- Tutors integrate the development of functional skills effectively within vocational subjects to help learners improve their life chances as well as to support progress in their vocational subjects. For example, tutors use activities centred on money management and business planning to improve mathematical skills; in health and social care, learners develop their use of language by constructing a letter of complaint based on a case study of autism.
- Aspire-i promotes equality and diversity successfully through the inclusive approaches that tutors take to meeting individual needs in lessons. Learners understand the relevance of equality and diversity to their own vocational area. For example, hospitality and catering learners emphasise the importance of knowing about different ways to prepare and present food for different cultures. Learners are respectful to each other as well as to tutors and they help to set and apply their own ground rules.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Strong leadership and changes to the management structure have had a positive impact on the organisation and its rate of improvement. The board of directors provides a clear strategic steer and scrutinises trends in participation and performance thoroughly. The board makes a good contribution to self-assessment and development planning and some members attend staff training.
- The company gives a high priority to improving the learning experience and learners' success rates but recognises that improvement measures have not yet had sufficient impact. Communication and consultation between managers, staff and partner organisations are more effective. Financial management is rigorous.
- Quality arrangements to strengthen teaching, learning and assessment are improving but are not yet consistently applied across the partnership. Lesson observation records vary considerably in quality; many judgements are not sufficiently evaluative and the evidence to support them is weak. Moderation is not sufficiently robust and observers need to make more explicit references to equality and diversity.
- Most staff are appropriately qualified and participate in professional-development events, including staff from partner organisations.
- Aspire-i staff have clear performance objectives and their progress is monitored effectively by managers and reviewed at appraisal. Aspire-i makes good use of data to monitor rigorously the work of subcontracted partners in meeting their challenging targets. Partners failing to meet targets for more than three months receive enhanced support and monitoring which encourages prompt action where there is underperformance.
- The self-assessment process uses the views of learners, staff and partner organisations well to identify improvements. The report is clearly written, mostly self-critical and with broadly accurate judgements. Action plans reflect priorities identified in the self-assessment report and actions taken are monitored systematically.
- The provider has strengthened quality improvement arrangements with additional staff and better use of accurate data. Robust auditing systems are in place. Workshops to share good practice are increasingly effective. Good support is given to less experienced or new

partners to help them develop their systems and practice.

- Aspire-i provides a good range of provision and is successful at working with some high profile partners that work successfully with disengaged young people to achieve positive outcomes. Learning programmes are planned flexibly to meet learners' needs and encourage participation. Regional and national data are used appropriately to determine priority areas for delivery and future developments.
- A broad range of vocational-subject options and choice of partners gives learners throughout the Bradford district good opportunities to make the right choice. Learners benefit from the close collaborative working between partners which has led to the development of a pre-Foundation Learning programme. However, there are not enough work experience opportunities.
- A strong collaborative ethos enables learners to be referred easily between partners to meet their needs. Engagement advisers play a vital role in supporting referrals, enabling learners to access the right course and overcome potential barriers to progress.
- Aspire-i and its partners protect learners and staff well from any bullying, harassment or discrimination. The partnership successfully engages minority and vulnerable groups. Data are used effectively to identify any significant gaps in achievement. Good use is made of competitions, festivals and enrichment to raise learners' awareness of equality issues. However, the impact of initiatives is not evaluated sufficiently.
- Aspire-i uses appropriate arrangements to ensure that legislative requirements for safeguarding are met. Plans are in place to bring about further improvements and staff training opportunities. Learner surveys indicate that learners feel safe when attending their learning programmes. Progress reviews reinforce learners' understanding of safeguarding.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Aspire-i Limited			
Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learning programmes	Foundation Learning
Overall effectiveness	3	3	3
Outcomes for learners	3	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	3	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	3	3

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

Provider details

Aspire-i Limited	
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16-18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 1005
	Part-time: 0
CEO	Caroline Harrison
Date of previous inspection	October 2009
Website address	http://www.aspire-i.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection								
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	997	8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Part-time	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Accent Regeneration and Community Partnerships Age UK Barnardo's Bradford Foyer EMD UK Forster Community College JAMES Motiv8 NACRO Panache Training Academy PRISM Trescom Urban Biz Woodspeen Work Quest YTA							

Additional socio-economic information

Bradford had a population of 523,100 in 2011, a figure expected to increase significantly at both ends of the age range. The district has a large and established Asian Pakistani community and a significant number of more recent immigrants from Eastern Europe. The most deprived local authority in West Yorkshire, the population includes a higher proportion of people recorded as economically inactive than for the country as a whole, and an average weekly take-home pay lower than the national average. The proportion of residents with no qualifications is higher than for Yorkshire and Humberside and for England as a whole. The provider delivers Foundation Learning across Bradford and in some other parts of West Yorkshire, subcontracting most of the provision to 17 partners.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Jan Smith HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and five additional inspectors, assisted by the head of learning and participation 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 subject areas listed in the report.

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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