

# Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership (GMCP) National Careers Service contractor

Inspection dates		1-5 July 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	<b>Good-2</b>
	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory-3
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
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:

- Customers considerably improve their knowledge of learning and work options and become highly motivated to achieve their identified goals.
- The quality of advice sessions is good with advisers using their knowledge and skills particularly well to help customers identify opportunities that will benefit them in their life ambitions.
- Customers have easy access to a good range of venues through well-managed direct delivery and subcontracted provision to ensure the diverse needs of customers are met.
- Advisers have high ambitions to raise the aspirations of customers.
- Advisers improve their skills through a wide range of training and development opportunities.
- The range and quality of partners are outstanding and work collaboratively to provide a seamless service that provides high levels of benefits to customers.
- The development of the quality framework ensures that all provision is rigorously monitored and high standards are set and met.

### This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The rate of positive progressions into learning or work needs to be higher.
- Not all customers experience good or outstanding advice sessions.
- Not enough formal and systematic use is made of data to identify areas that need developing or to plan further improvements.
- Trustees do not yet have sufficient information to monitor the progression rates of customers or of the quality of provision to enable them to provide sufficient challenge to managers.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the rate of customers progressing into learning or work by ensuring that all advisers have and use their skills, knowledge and confidence fully to enable customers to take full responsibility for the actions identified in their skills action plans.
- Ensure advisers, both direct delivery and subcontracted provision, share good practice identified from observations, to continue to improve the quality of advice sessions, particularly when working with customers with more complex and challenging barriers.
- Ensure trustees have better information on the quality of provision so that they can provide a greater level of challenge to effect more rapid improvements.
- Improve the formal process of the analysis and use of data, to ensure challenging targets are set and regularly monitored to improve aspects of the provision.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The rate of progress outcomes for customers entering a learning programme or gaining employment requires improvement. Outcome data are available for the first three quarter periods since the start of the new contract in April 2012. Progressions during the first two quarters are around nationally established performance benchmarks. Unemployed customers make slightly better progress into work in relation to national expectations. The latest quarter is indicating a higher rate of outcomes but contacts are still active and not yet complete.</li> <li>▪ Advisers rapidly establish customers' personal details including any education, training and previous employment history, which is used very effectively as a base for discussions during advice sessions to identify customers' needs.</li> <li>▪ Customers considerably improve their confidence and self-esteem. They develop greater motivation to pursue the actions discussed between themselves and their adviser and agreed in their skills action plan. One customer was so keen to start agreed actions, that an available computer was accessed immediately after the advice session was finished, to start job searching.</li> <li>▪ GMCP acknowledges that the number of customers who fail to attend advice sessions had been too high in the past and developed a range of positive actions to bring this rate down. Rigorous monitoring of the impact of these actions is showing a significant improvement this year in the number of customers who attend appointed sessions. During the inspection, attendance was good.</li> <li>▪ GMCP collects an expansive range of information about the performance of different groups of customers. However, there is limited attention to formally recording any analysis of this information, of actions identified to improve gaps in the provision, and of their impact. However, there is some evidence to show that focused actions were identified to address the low progressions rate of customers aged 18 to 24 years during the last year, along with monitoring to check on progress.</li> <li>▪ Customers develop higher levels of self-awareness and a much-improved understanding of how to overcome barriers that impede their progress. Very effective support by advisers encourages customers to identify their abilities and skills, including English and mathematics. In a small minority of sessions, advisers spent too little time addressing customers' more complex needs or overcoming barriers to further progression.</li> </ul>	

**The quality of teaching, learning and assessment****Good**

- The quality of information and advice that customers receive is good and while it is too early in this new contract period to affect positive progressions fully, it is clear that customers become motivated and empowered to progress independently towards their goals.
- Customers significantly increase their knowledge and awareness of the options and range of support they can access. Attendance is carefully monitored and good actions taken to prompt customers to attend.
- Customers benefit from good care and support which raises aspirations and increases motivation. The good rapport that is rapidly developed between advisers and customers enables very effective engagement.
- Advisers use sensitive questioning to challenge customers' negative perceptions towards their ability to progress. In the majority of sessions, advisers use tailored methods and approaches very effectively to explore barriers to learning and work, develop personalised skills action plans and promote independent learning. A small minority of advisers lack the confidence and skills to challenge customers about potential barriers, such as unrealistic aspirations and the impact of health issues on securing employment.
- Advisers use their expertise and local knowledge well to help customers consider relevant opportunities. For example, an adviser directed the customer to a local care home who provides volunteering opportunities. Customers are effectively engaged in agreeing appropriate personalised goals. Group sessions reinforce good practice in job search techniques and promote a positive attitude. In these sessions, customers receive extensive and helpful resources to reinforce the guidance.
- Advisers maintain the interest and engagement of the majority of customers and frequently promote access to technology-based resources. Venues for advice sessions, in the majority of settings, provide comfort and privacy. However, there is insufficient use of paper-based resources, such as hints and tips for job searching, that customers would find useful to take away from the session with them.
- Initial assessment of customers' needs and desired outcomes is good. Exploration of previous experience, qualifications and potential barriers to learning and work is used well to negotiate short and long-term goals. The quality of skills action plans has improved significantly since the last inspection, with the majority having well recorded details that give customers a clear picture of their next steps. Advisers conscientiously reinforce the key goals at the close of sessions. There are still though a small minority of skills action plans where recorded actions are less detailed and challenging.
- Customers attending subsequent sessions are effectively engaged in reviewing their achievements and discussing the next stage. Customers take responsibility for their own progress and use their personalised skills action plans very effectively to make good progress towards their future. They make significant progress towards agreed targets and advisers monitor previously set actions very effectively.
- Advisers effectively promote the development of skills in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. The majority of advisers clearly emphasise the significance of these skills in securing employment. However, for a minority of customers, discussions relating to improving these skills are too brief, and advisers do not promote improvements sufficiently. Customers are routinely encouraged to develop their computing skills to enable them to develop their competencies in using web-based resources.
- Customers receive high quality impartial information and advice, often with a range of options, that empowers them to make choices that suits their personal circumstance. Customers receive very detailed information about their entitlement to the National Careers Service (NCS) and advice in developing effective curriculum vitae, interview techniques and strategies to progress into work or learning. Advisors link very effectively with Jobcentre staff and other

specialised agencies to support customers with a range of personal and welfare issues, such as mental health, finance and housing.

- The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Advisers provide good individual support for the different and sometimes complex needs of customers, and seek different ways to engage with them. The diverse variety of locations and subcontractors ensures that the service reaches a good spread of customers. A good ethos of mutual respect and courtesy exists between customers and advisers, which encourages engagement. Advisers provide good guidance and information on data protection and the confidentiality of information.

## **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

**Good**

- The effectiveness of the leadership and management of GMCP provision is good. GMCP has made significant progress to realise the company's clear vision of establishing high quality provision across the two National Careers Service (NCS) contracts it currently holds. GMCP has set and met demanding participation targets for the service as a whole and for the 20 subcontractors. A few subcontractors have exceeded their participation targets.
- Since securing its contract in April 2012, GMCP has made expected progress to meet the national targets for progression. The targets are very challenging for some subcontractors and do not take full account of the geographic or economic context. GMCP evaluates the performance of its direct delivery and subcontractors across both contracts rigorously and systematically. The company takes highly effective action to tackle underperformance for example, terminating the contract of a subcontractor by rapidly and effectively bringing the delivery of service in-house.
- All staff have high ambitions for their customers and are committed to securing continuous improvement to the service. All partners work well together to provide a very effective service for its customers. Although not all customers experience good or outstanding advice sessions managers have invested time, effort and funds heavily to improve the quality of advice sessions, through a combination of support and robust performance management measures. This was evident during the inspection in the much improved advice sessions since the previous inspection.
- The board of trustees are very experienced, knowledgeable and passionate in their commitment to provide a high quality information and advice service. They receive regular reports from managers on the overall performance of the contract. However, their ability to challenge, support and guide managers on how the service could be more effective is limited, as they do not have a clear view on the quality of the NCS provision, any barriers and their impact.
- Resources, including accommodation, facilities and technologies, are generally good and support staff in their roles very well. However, due to technical problems the information recording system does not always work effectively and occasionally results in customers not having a printed copy of their skills action plans during the advice session.
- GMCP ensure that all staff have the necessary experience and skills needed to carry out their roles. The large majority of advisers are well qualified or working towards an appropriate qualification; they are experienced and have good knowledge of local and national opportunities. All advisers have good access to a range of training and development, which is highly valued by subcontractors.
- The self-assessment process is inclusive of all direct delivery and subcontracted managers and advisers as well the views of customers and other partners. The latest self-assessment report provides a detailed and realistic account of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.
- Quality improvement planning effectively and correctly targets areas that require further development. GMCP has successfully improved on all but one of the weaknesses to its provision identified at the previous inspection. While GMCP has increased the range of

available data it collects very well, managers do not routinely conduct formal analysis of the data to plan improvements.

- GMCP plans and manages its services particularly well to meet the needs of a diverse range of customers. Partnerships with many local children centres, local further education colleges, and specialist subcontractors working with the 'hard to reach' groups are excellent. The co-location of its provision within Jobcentre Plus offices works very well and ensures easy access for customers referred to them. Subcontractors, chosen with care for their expertise and local knowledge, widen access and strengthen the provision considerably.
- Staff, at all levels, are well aware of equality and diversity aspects and foster a culture of respect and inclusion for customers. GMCP adequately assesses the impact of its actions on different groups of customers. It is well aware of how customers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are performing better than other groups; and recognises that there is an unequal balance of female, Asian and Somali customers. However, the company acknowledges that it needs to undertake more work to reduce the variation in positive progressions of different groups of customers.
- Safeguarding arrangements currently meet statutory requirements. GMCP conducts robust background checks on all front line staff and on the suitability of venues and premises, including where possible, access to private rooms for customer interviews. Customers feel safe in the venues.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership		
<b>Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance:</b>  1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	<b>Overall</b>	<b>National Careers Service</b>
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Outcomes for learners	3	3
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	2

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
<b>National Careers Service</b>	<b>2</b>



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- Hope Centre
  - Inspira
  - Knowsley Works
  - Local Solutions
  - Nelson and Colne College
  - Opportunities shop
  - Preston College
  - Starting Point
  - TCV Enterprise Ltd.
  - Veda Recruitment and Training
  - Warrington Disability Partnership
  - West Cheshire College



## Additional socio-economic information

National Careers Service Northwest (excluding Greater Manchester) was launched by Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Ltd (GMCP) in April 2012. GMCP has two of the twelve prime contracts across England; Greater Merseyside and Cheshire and Warrington; and Cumbria and Lancashire.

## Information about this inspection

### Lead inspector

Diane Stacey HMI

Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the subcontract 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 customers' positive outcomes 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 advice sessions and learning sessions. 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.

## 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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