

First Rung Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		4–8 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Good-2
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 learners make good progress into further training, education and employment. This is achieved because they are inspired by First Rung Limited (FR) trainers, develop strong work-related skills and attitudes and undertake high quality work placements.
- Learners with poor previous attainment levels respond very positively to the FR approach to learning and most make good progress. Remarkable success stories are regularly celebrated which inspire learners.
- Strong leadership and excellent, inclusive communications result in a highly motivated, inspirational team which is entirely focused on learners and learning. A particularly effective board of trustees has a good understanding of the provision and both supports and challenges senior managers.
- Systems for the management and development of staff are very effective and reflect the high priority placed on improving outcomes for learners.
- Learners benefit from good initial information, advice and guidance and this continues throughout their time at FR, along with good, supportive, pastoral care.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- While teaching, learning and assessment are predominantly good, not enough of the classroom teaching and learning sessions are yet good or outstanding. FR managers focus too much on teaching rather than learning in internal observations; the recently-introduced monthly meetings for trainers do not yet enable sufficiently the sharing of good and outstanding practice.
- FR gives insufficient priority to the teaching of functional skills to ensure that learners make rapid progress; not enough learners achieve level 1 qualifications or where appropriate level 2 in functional skills before moving on to higher level courses or employment.
- Despite considerable efforts by the FR managers and trainers, attendance and punctuality are not consistently good in classroom sessions, leading to slow learning for some learners and a minority failing to complete their course.

Full report

What does First Rung Limited need to do to improve further?

- Develop the internal teaching and learning observation process to focus on the learning that results from good teaching, rather than focusing predominantly on teaching practice. Ensure that observation paperwork focuses on the learner and learning more effectively, and includes a checklist to guide observers. As planned, reintroduce moderation of judgements to increase the accuracy of observations.
- Continue to support FR trainers to develop good and outstanding teaching practice that leads to ever-improved learning. Share good practice more effectively and develop an understanding of outstanding practice, for example through the recently-introduced monthly meetings that bring together trainers.
- Quickly implement existing plans to improve the functional skills qualification levels of the FR trainers to improve their ability to ensure that all learners benefit from English and mathematics sessions that challenge the most able and support the less able.
- Improve attendance and punctuality by inspiring learners and using the warning system more effectively to support behaviour change.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
------------------------------	------

- A high proportion of FR's learners make huge progress, achieve most of their learning goals and move forward to higher level courses or to employment; as a result, outcomes for learners are good. Where learners do not achieve all their goals, it is usually because they leave the course early because they have secured employment or have progressed to another course. Learners, including a significant proportion with low starting points and barriers to learning, make rapid progress and develop skills and attitudes that fit them well for employment, higher-level education or training.
- Learners develop swiftly through a very effective blend of classroom learning, work reviews with excellent feedback and very high quality work experience placements. FR staff regularly visit the learners on work placement to work with learners and employers to ensure maximum progress in appropriate skill development. The need to secure more work placements, as learner numbers increase, has been recognised and FR managers have recruited an additional employment development adviser.
- FR rightly prides itself in its determination to provide individual learning programmes that meet the needs of all learners, irrespective of their previous attainment levels. This approach results in a significant number of remarkable success stories and these are widely celebrated, providing inspiration to other learners.
- Learners' attendance and punctuality improve during their programmes as most learners, some of whom may not have had positive experiences at school, respond well to the encouraging and supportive approach taken by the FR trainers. That said, attendance and punctuality require improvement. Additional learner support funds are used very effectively to enable and encourage learners, who need financial support to continue and gain the most from their programmes.
- The impressive improvement learners make in a wide range of skills and attitudes improves their employment prospects. They develop appropriate self-confidence, personal and social skills, alongside improving their abilities in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). This improvement is not yet reflected strongly enough in the attainment of functional skills qualifications at level 1. FR senior managers have recognised that improvement

is required and some trainers will be enhancing their qualifications and skills to help more learners secure functional skills qualifications. Learners produce high quality work and receive helpful and accurate feedback on errors in grammar or punctuation, which supports improvement in their written English.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, which is reflected in the high number of learners who develop strong work-related skills and who make very good progress into jobs, further education or training.
- FR trainers develop a very good understanding of learners' individual and often complex needs. They skilfully encourage and support learners, many of whom are not used to settling down to work in formal learning situations. Trainers have high expectations of their learners, which motivates them, raises their aspirations and encourages good participation in lessons. The good work placements and job coaching ensure that learners gain a very clear understanding of the world of work.
- Teaching and learning sessions are mostly good and successfully stimulate and engage learners. Trainers use their expertise to very good effect in lessons to promote and maintain learners' interest and motivation. For example, in a customer service lesson, learners role played scenarios about problems that they might have to deal with. Most lessons are well structured. Trainers make very useful links to previous learning and the workplace. Good learning environments in each of the four centres help promote learning.
- Learners participate fully in the lively group discussions and complete learning activities with enthusiasm. Trainers are skilful at managing discussions and encouraging learners to develop confidence in speaking, for example customer service learners discussed the impact that comments put on social media can have on a company. Learners are assessed through very effective questioning. They are encouraged to reflect and work out solutions. In the better sessions, trainers review and consolidate learning and check understanding regularly.
- Planning for a minority of lessons requires further development to ensure that activities are organised better to meet individual learners' needs and challenge all learners sufficiently. In the less effective sessions, interactive and imaginative learning materials are not used well enough to support learning. A small minority of trainers rely too much on worksheets and, as a result, learners become distracted. In a few sessions learners do not have enough chances to participate because the trainer talks too much.
- Staff accurately identify learners' starting points and devise flexible and personalised training programmes which meet learners' needs, interests and aspirations. Initial assessment is very good and learners benefit from a detailed and thorough analysis of their prior attainment and additional support needs.
- Staff thoroughly assess and prepare learners for work experience placements and fully involve employers in setting challenging tasks to build learners' skills and improve their employment prospects. Learners are clear about what is required of them in the workplace, but are less clear about their learning targets for the broader objectives of the programme including the development of their English, mathematics and ICT skills.
- Assessment of learning is particularly strong. Staff regularly assess learners' work and provide frequent and constructive written and verbal feedback. Progress reviews of learners' performance in the workplace are mostly excellent. Learners receive detailed feedback on areas to improve, with detailed action plans that are agreed with employers. Learners become confident at assessing their own performance and respond well to carefully structured questions and feedback on how to improve their skills. In a childcare lesson groups of learners designed a nursery and then devised questions to test their fellow learners' knowledge of nursery design. This not only tested knowledge, it developed skills in giving and receiving constructive feedback.

- The development of learners' English, mathematics and ICT skills requires improvement. Too few achieve a qualification before leaving the study programme and gaining employment or enrolling for further courses. However, a significant minority of trainers incorporate opportunities to develop learners' English skills in the programme, and the quality of learners' written work in portfolios is good. Learners also understand the importance of developing their functional skills in order to progress to education, training and employment. Managers recognise the need to improve the teaching and achievement of functional skills and have plans in place to achieve this.
- Advice, guidance and support are good. Learners benefit from comprehensive support and properly targeted financial assistance, which are given a high priority by FR managers. Interview and induction arrangements are very thorough and mean that from the start learners feel able to seek advice and guidance from any of the staff. They are also clear about the demands of their programmes and the measures they need to take meet these successfully. The support they receive gives them confidence to tackle tasks which they would otherwise feel were too challenging for them. Support for work experience is particularly good and enables learners to gain maximum benefit from their time in the workplace.
- The promotion of equality and diversity through teaching and learning is good. Learners greatly value the respect that is shown by both the staff and their fellow learners, which makes them feel secure in the centres and able to focus on their studies. Learners have diverse backgrounds but all feel welcome and made to feel their opinions and contributions are valued. Teaching materials are suitably representative of a diverse population. Trainers handle sensitive material particularly well, which enables learners to explore issues and opinions which may be controversial without fear of being embarrassed. Trainers skilfully manage discussions to help develop learners' better understanding with more accurate information. Individual social and economic needs are recognised and supported outstandingly well.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. The FR board of trustees and the senior managers have clear and ambitious goals for FR. The strategic plan is succinct, but clear, with an appropriate focus on the learners' experience. For example, trustees and managers have a clear focus on improving already very good progression rates and increasing the proportion of learners who achieve functional skills qualifications.
- The trustees have a very good understanding of FR and take a close interest in its performance. At the quarterly meetings, they are provided with a good range of information, including key data such as progression rates. Trustees challenge the senior management group where appropriate and support them to achieve higher standards for learners. Trustees are chosen because of their expertise and knowledge, helping FR managers to understand more fully the sectors in which they work and helping them to develop programmes that better meet the needs of learners. Trustees have a wide range of experience including as employers, charity sector, human resource and finance professionals.
- Communications within FR are particularly effective. The chief executive officer produces an excellent weekly email that goes to all staff. It informs them about a range of operational issues, national developments, as well as celebrating the successes of individual members of staff and FR as a whole. It is particularly effective in engendering a real team spirit within the organisation and develops an ethos of continuous improvement. Staff comment positively about it, saying that they really look forward to receiving it every week.
- FR's strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment are generally effective. The system of observation of teaching, learning and assessment is well documented, although there is an over emphasis on the trainer's performance rather than how much progress the learners have made. The range of grades in FR's internal assessment report is accurate, broadly reflecting the grades given by inspectors. Trainers have the opportunity to share good

practice at regular monthly trainer meetings. However, too much variation remains in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

- Self-assessment is a regular part of quality improvement and is inclusive, closely involving all members of staff. It also takes into account the views of employers, learners and other stakeholders. The resulting internal assessment and the associated quality improvement plan are broadly accurate and reflect the areas for development identified by inspectors. Improvement actions are clear and the majority are completed by the target dates. Data are used very effectively to monitor the performance of the provision. The senior management group (SMG) reviews key data at their monthly meetings to identify any emerging areas of concern and record actions to be taken.
- FR's system of appraisal is very detailed, identifying the member of staff's performance and achievements along with areas for development. The resulting documents are an effective basis for improvement in performance and identifying any needs for additional training. Trainers are appropriately qualified, almost all having appropriate teaching qualifications; a number are working towards higher levels. However, trainers require further development in the delivery of mathematics and English; FR managers have already planned training.
- The SMG has developed very effective relationships with a range of employers to provide good quality work placements for learners. Some of these are large, nationally recognised companies.
- The SMG has also developed very good partnerships which are very effective in providing opportunities for learners. Examples include providing an alternative curriculum for 14- to 16-year-olds on behalf of local authorities and schools, a number of programmes provided through the European Social Fund targeting young people who are not in education, employment or training, and providing subcontracted apprenticeships. As a result, FR has developed clear and effective progression routes for learners from the alternative curriculum programme, through the study programme and on to apprenticeships.
- Equality and diversity are strongly promoted by FR managers. They have developed very effective policies and procedures to prevent learners being harassed or bullied. FR analyses data by ethnicity and other categories, but some of this analysis uses categories that are too broad, which could mask achievement gaps between different groups. FR is aware of the under representation of males on its programmes and has started to develop its approach to marketing and recruitment to attract young males more effectively. Trainers mostly promote equality and diversity very well in lessons.
- FR meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding of learners. All staff and trustees have undergone relevant criminal record checks and have been trained in safeguarding at an appropriate level. FR recognises that some learners need extra help and assesses each learner during the initial interview to ensure that each is appropriately safeguarded. Breakfast snacks, luncheon vouchers and afternoon snacks are provided free of charge to improve learners' focus on their learning. The location of placements is carefully considered to ensure easy access for learners. Learners are currently undertaking a well thought out safeguarding project covering, for example, e-safety and safety whilst travelling to FR's centres and while they are out in the evenings.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

First Rung Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes
Overall effectiveness	2	2
Outcomes for learners	2	2
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
Foundation learning	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 201								
	Part-time: 101								
Principal/CEO	Mrs Diane Betts								
Date of previous inspection	January 2010								
Website address	www.firstrung.org.uk/								
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	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Part-time	19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	1		-		-				
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	-	-	-	-	-	-			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Nil								

Contextual information

FR is a registered charity, which was established in 1983. It operates as an independent learning provider and much of its provision comprises study programmes for 16- to 19-year-olds in foundation learning. FR also delivers alternative curriculum provision for 14- to 16-year-olds for local authorities and schools, and subcontracts apprenticeships for a local college. FR is based in North London and operates from centres in Edmonton, Colindale, Watford and Tottenham. Learners with very diverse academic, economic and cultural backgrounds are recruited from the London Boroughs of Enfield, Barnet, Brent, Haringey, Harrow, Watford and Waltham Forest.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Mark Shackleton HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four additional inspectors, assisted by the quality improvement 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 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>

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



Learner View is a new website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too.

To find out more go to www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and provider inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)
[Store St](#)
[Manchester](#)
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

© Crown copyright 2013