

Release Potential Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		19–22 November 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- Good short-course provision for unemployed adults enables over a third of learners to progress to apprenticeships or into jobs following their training.
- Apprentices make good progress and develop valuable vocational, technical and professional skills that enable them to enhance their contribution to their workplace.
- Many learners benefit from the good training they receive on innovative employability short courses. These equip learners with enhanced occupational skills and knowledge of work practices and requirements that give them real advantages when applying for jobs.
- There are close and very positive working relationships with employers, who contribute actively to learners' training.
- Productive use is made of trainers' and assessors' expertise and knowledge to extend learners' knowledge and skills through mostly good teaching and learning.
- Effective leadership is reflected in the very thorough management support, guidance and care for staff which exemplifies a model employment practice for learners. Staff are strongly committed to the company's priorities and vision.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The success rates of apprentices within the planned time are not yet good. Learners are not yet achieving their functional skills early enough.
- Not enough of the teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding and observers of its quality do not focus sufficiently on learning.
- The summary analysis and use of management information to inform strategic planning and monitoring are underdeveloped.
- Further improvements are needed in the development of all learners' wider knowledge of equality and diversity.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Increase apprentices' success rates within the planned time and the achievement of functional skills earlier in their programme.
- Extend the skills of team leaders and assessors so that they can improve their use of learning technologies to enrich learning and the quality of feedback given in progress reviews.
- Continue to develop staff competence and confidence in extending and deepening learners' understanding and knowledge of equality and diversity.
- Ensure quality systems are consistently and fully applied to all aspects of training, learning and assessment and include a greater focus on learning and the learner
- Strengthen the management and use of data to improve planning and monitoring of provision.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A significant majority of apprentices make good progress and develop strong work-related skills and practices. Employers particularly value their enhanced vocational skills and are confident that they can rely on apprentices to take on additional responsibilities at work. Apprentices enjoy their programmes and develop good personal qualities such as confidence and self-esteem. ▪ Employers know that learners who attend short pre-employment programmes demonstrate a strong commitment to working in the care sector and get a basic knowledge of the demands of the role before being employed. Over a third of learners completing these programmes move into jobs and a few progress very quickly to apprenticeships. ▪ Some employed apprentices secure new job roles or promotions through their studies, particularly when they progress from intermediate to advanced apprenticeships. Some employed apprentices receive a pay increase when they complete their framework. Learners' success is given a high profile and celebrated publicly through various activities including presentation evenings with partner organisations such as the National Health Service. ▪ Achievement rates on the 'It's for me' short courses for unemployed adults were high at over 90% in 2012/13. Of 302 learners 99 got jobs and 16 signed up for an apprenticeship, mainly in health and social care. Several employers include learners completing these courses in their short lists of people to interview when vacancies arise. ▪ In 2012/13 the provider's data show that overall success rates for advanced apprentices were around national averages in administration, business management, and health and social care. Overall success rates for intermediate apprentices are lower but generally satisfactory. Success rates within the planned time were low in the same period largely because of the late introduction of functional skills into apprenticeship programmes. ▪ In the current year the number of apprentices completing by their planned end date shows a significant improvement. In 2012/13 large numbers of learners achieved the vocational elements of the framework but there were serious delays in the achievement of functional skills. For example, for the small number of apprentices in intermediate business administration only 38% achieved the full framework on time whereas 63% achieved the National Vocational Qualification only. The new staff team is accelerating the achievement of functional skills for new learners by introducing them much earlier in the framework. ▪ The provider is not yet systematically analysing the difference between the outcomes for particular groups of learners, and the numbers from minority ethnic groups are too small to make meaningful comparisons. 	

- The provider now offers good support to learners to achieve the required level of English and mathematical skills but not all are challenged sufficiently to achieve at a higher level. Apprentices have a satisfactory understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and of relevant equality and diversity issues.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good, which reflects the good development of employment-related skills and the improving overall successful completion of qualification frameworks for the majority of learners.
- Learners completing the two-week 'It's for me' employment training courses grow significantly in confidence and gain valuable experience in completing curriculum vitae and preparing for interviews. Many are successful in gaining employment as a result of completing the course. Apprentices develop good work-related skills which are valued by their employers.
- Learners receive very good support from training staff and employers who motivate them to succeed. Tutors and assessors are appropriately qualified and most have relevant experience of working in the industry where their learners are based. They make good use of this experience to enliven training and coaching sessions as well as to build strong and productive relationships with the employers.
- Tutors and assessors skilfully plan training workshops, assessments and visits. Assessment visits are planned flexibly to meet the needs of the learners and to avoid disruption to their work commitments. Assessors use an appropriate range of assessment methods, giving priority to on-the-job observations and guided discussions. They provide good oral feedback to learners which is recorded digitally and then transcribed for storage on the new electronic portfolio system. However, few learners routinely access this e-portfolio so that they do not always have a written record of the feedback to help them prepare thoroughly for the next visit.
- Learners develop their understanding of the technical requirements for their qualification through good quality written resources. Materials to support the development of functional skills in English are particularly well developed and adapted to suit the vocational context in which the learners are working. However, the equivalent resources for mathematics are more generic. Tutors make good references and links to the internet to enable learners to work independently in taught workshops. However, assessors make little use of information and communication technology (ICT) in assessment visits even where the resources are readily available.
- Trainers use effective diagnostic initial assessment to identify new learners who require additional support to develop their functional skills. However, occasional delays in providing the support and in preparing learners for assessment discourages those learners whose job role could support more rapid progress.
- Assessors conduct progress reviews at regular intervals that meet the requirements of the awarding authority. The reviews focus appropriately on the learners' progress through their framework and the completion of units. Assessors also discuss progression routes at a final review. Some learners include in their reviews training provided by their employers, but assessors do not always take sufficient account of this contribution. Employers are generally aware of apprentices' progress but they are not always involved in the reviews.
- Information, advice and guidance give learners a good understanding of the requirements of their programme as well as progression pathways and opportunities. Individual learning plans include accurate records of the units learners will be completing, as agreed with their employers, as well as their additional support needs.
- The arrangements to help learners to develop their functional skills have been considerably improved following the appointment of a new specialist team of trainers and assessors. They visit learners regularly to provide individual coaching, with weekly visits to those learners identified as needing intensive support. Learners fully understand the importance of developing good functional skills and their impact on their jobs and future progression. However, there are still some delays in arranging individual support and opportunities to complete a functional skills

unit following the diagnostic assessment. Because of this a few apprentices and employers regard functional skills as additional to the programme rather than as an important integral component.

- Equality and diversity topics are introduced naturally in the short-course workshops, where learners develop a good understanding through case studies and discussions. Assessors check apprentices' familiarity with their employers' policies and procedures for equality and diversity but they do not use reviews sufficiently to extend learners' wider understanding.

Health and social care

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment are good as reflected in the overall outcomes for learners. Outcomes are now good for those on employability and intermediate apprenticeship programmes and have improved to national averages on advanced apprenticeships. Employers comment positively on apprentices' enhanced knowledge and skills, gains in confidence, improved team-working skills and ability to reflect on their practice and provide a good standard of care. Many gain promotion or progress to the next level of study.
- Two-week pre-employment courses are highly accessible and run in community venues near to learners' homes. Learners gain a wide range of knowledge and skills essential for work in care. Many successfully gain employment in domiciliary care and care homes and later enrol on apprenticeship programmes.
- Well-qualified assessors use their wide range of professional experience in different vocational settings to enhance learning. For example, through an assessor's knowledge of domiciliary care and skilful questioning a care learner was able to show a good understanding of and sensitivity to ethical considerations in creating the right balance between a client's rights and wishes and her duty of care.
- Information, advice and guidance adequately ensure learners understand programme requirements and timescales for completion. Reviews include information on opportunities for progression and signpost learners to further study.
- Well-planned teaching and learning opportunities on employability programmes encourage learners to work effectively with others, to reflect on their own experiences and explore current issues within health and care. For example, learners worked confidently in small groups to explore potential barriers to communication that could arise with clients, after which they successfully reviewed strategies to improve them.
- The planning of one-to-one and group workshop sessions for apprentices is good. Learners and employers value assessors' flexible approach to planning regular visits to accommodate staff rotas, particularly in domiciliary care and the hospital.
- Assessors regularly review progress and set realistic targets for completing units. They do not always sufficiently encourage the more-able learners to develop a deeper understanding of topics and the full implications for their professional practice. Learners benefit from assessors' thorough oral feedback and suggestions for improvement, although written feedback is insufficiently detailed.
- The use of ICT to enhance learning is underdeveloped. Portfolios are mainly paper-based although some learners word process their work and use the internet for research. However, very few illustrate their wider reading in a bibliography, an important study skill for those hoping to progress to higher education. Learners have a fuller understanding of their progress from digital recordings of guided discussions after their practice at work has been observed by assessors.
- The development of functional English is good. There is slow implementation of plans to develop mathematics for all and ICT for the small number of apprentices on the children and young people's pathway. Thorough initial assessment identifies areas for improvement informing the type of individual support required to build confidence and competence.

- Apprentices demonstrate a good understanding of equality and diversity issues in personal or child-centred care. However, opportunities to improve their professional practice further are not always explored during sessions and reviews. Apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves and those for whom they care safe.

Administration and business management

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement and this is reflected in many learners' failure to complete by their planned end date. Learners receive adequate individual support in their workplace, which is strongly focused on progress towards achievement of their National Vocational Qualification units. Some current learners are making slow progress.
- Tutors use their good vocational skills and experience to provide effective support for learners. They have a good understanding of the organisations in which learners are employed, which is used to benefit learners when planning assessment activities.
- In larger organisations groups of learners develop good employability skills including increased levels of self-confidence. They improve their workplace skills in a wide range of administrative and management tasks such as more effective team leading, writing minutes of board meetings and using a range of computer applications including complex spreadsheets.
- Initial assessment is adequate and, more recently, where learners require further support, this is put in place quickly. Appropriate long-term targets are set and recorded but these targets are not always used effectively to help motivate learners to achieve more quickly. Assessors place too much emphasis on setting short- and medium-term targets.
- Assessments are carefully planned and sufficiently flexible to meet learners' and employers' needs. Assessors provide satisfactory oral feedback to encourage further improvement. However, written feedback is not detailed enough.
- Some learners submit evidence between visits for assessment, which is promptly dealt with. The provider has recently changed its electronic portfolio system but learners have had to wait too long for it to be implemented.
- Progress reviews require improvement and activities do not always include discussion with employers. Too many written reviews do not capture learners' progress sufficiently or provide guidance on aspects needing further improvement. Learners are not always clear about the progress they are making.
- Tracking of all learners' progress is managed through a paper-based system which does not provide a sufficiently detailed analysis of progress made across the levels of qualification or by different groups, making it difficult to spot slow progress early enough.
- Most employers support learners' development of good vocational skills and a few offer opportunities for further skills development. Employers value assessors' support as this enables their staff to gain qualifications and extend their knowledge and skills.
- Learners work toward the completion of an appropriate level of functional skills qualifications. Due to staffing issues not all learners have received enough support and some are making very slow progress towards achieving their framework. However, this situation is now improving.
- Learners receive adequate information and guidance at induction. In some cases assessors discuss opportunities for progression during visits to support their choices about further study and career progression.
- Safeguarding and equality and diversity are not promoted sufficiently. Learners explore these aspects through their course work and the employment rights and responsibilities workbook. Standard questions raised in quarterly progress reviews are not supported by clearly written records of what was discussed and what further learning might be required.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are good. The directors have a clearly defined strategy and ambitious vision for supporting all learners and developing the organisation and its training programmes. For example, in addition to remaining at the forefront of health and social care training, plans are at an advanced stage for introducing hairdressing provision in a purpose-built training suite in a location which is easily accessible by public transport followed, in due course, by film and television courses.
- Investment in staffing is very good. Recent staff appointments have strengthened the leadership team. Staff roles and responsibilities are clear and specific. Staff welfare is excellent, with the directors providing free medical insurance, generous holiday entitlement and, for those employees who travel in the course of their work, company cars. Staff induction successfully ensures that new members of staff are quickly integrated into the company.
- A high priority is given to continuing professional development for managers, team leaders, assessors and administrators. As the provider recognises, insufficient importance is given to team leaders and assessors renewing their professional, commercial and industrial experience by undertaking planned work experience on employers' premises.
- Communication within the organisation is good. Monthly management meetings provide good opportunities for directors and team leaders to discuss a range of strategic issues such as staffing, staff development and accommodation. Monthly curriculum meetings give good opportunities to managers, team leaders and assessors to review programme developments, identify and share best practice, and standardise assessments.
- Employer engagement is particularly strong and employers value highly the services provided by the company. Senior managers are extremely committed to building strong relationships with learners, employers and external organisations. Very good relationships have been developed with Jobcentre Plus and the company is now recruiting learners from 23 Jobcentre Plus offices over a very large geographical area.
- The company has well-established arrangements for observing the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. All tutors and assessors are observed a minimum of three times a year and good support is available to tutors and assessors who are not graded as good or better. The observations do not focus sufficiently on learning, subject matter, functional skills and learners' progress.
- While the provider has contributed to subcontractors' self-assessment reports, it has not previously produced its own self-assessment report. The draft report for 2012/13 contains no separate graded reports for curriculum areas and differences in their quality are not identified. However, the grades awarded to overall effectiveness and the 'Common Inspection Framework' aspects are accurate. The quality improvement plan for 2013/14 recognises weaknesses identified by inspectors and action is being taken to eliminate them.
- Good emphasis is now placed on reviewing and evaluating staff effectiveness. Underperforming staff are quickly identified and strategies are implemented to improve their performance. If these measures are unsuccessful employees' contracts are terminated in accordance with established employment procedures.
- The use of data to monitor and manage the provision requires improvement. The management information system is unreliable and unable to produce accurate data. Managers have previously given insufficient attention to monitoring learners' progress and whether apprentices are on target to complete their programme by the planned end date.
- The provider recognises that cancelled assessment visits and the late introduction of functional skills were the main reasons for learners not completing their apprenticeship programme within the planned time. Functional skills are now introduced at the start of the apprenticeship programme and this, together with closer monitoring of assessment visits and learners' progress, are helping to ensure they are on track to complete by their planned end date.

- All learners and staff are valued and treated with dignity and respect. A comprehensive range of policies and procedures, including lone working, and data protection and information security, is implemented successfully to protect staff and learners from harassment and bullying and to ensure they are treated fairly and equitably. Arrangements for ensuring that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities can participate in learning are successful. However, as the provider acknowledges, not all outcomes for learners are sufficiently analysed to identify achievement gaps. Further equality and diversity training is required to ensure staff have the knowledge and confidence to extend learners' understanding of equal opportunities.
- Learners feel safe and the provider meets its statutory requirements for safeguarding learners. These procedures are regularly reviewed and all staff attend annual update training.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Release Potential 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
Health and social care	2
Administration	3
Business Management	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 0								
	Part-time: 1,106								
Principal/CEO	Mrs Gaye Hutchinson								
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable								
Website address	www.release-potential.co.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	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	4	308	N/A	17	N/A	3	N/A	N/A	
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	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+			
	3	328	4	432	N/A	N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16									
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	312								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	N/A								

Contextual information

Release Potential Ltd is a private training provider founded in 2008 and located in the Tyne Valley. The company operates in urban and rural areas across the North East region, delivering training to employed and unemployed learners. At 9.1%, the North East region had one of the highest unemployment rates nationally between January and October 2013 according to the Office for National Statistics. Training for employed learners is principally in the form of apprenticeships, the majority of which are in the subject areas of health and social care, business and administration, and hospitality and catering. Training takes place mainly in employers' premises. The company also provides training for unemployed people as a route into employment and in response to demands from employers. Additional training is subcontracted to the provider by three local further-education colleges. This is the company's first inspection.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Fred Brown
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One lead inspector and four additional inspectors, assisted by the Head of Curriculum and Quality as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plan. 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234

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