

Prospects Learning Foundation

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		02–06 December 2013
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
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:

- Good management and outstanding visionary leadership ensure that an increasing number of learners, including those from areas of deprivation and low-achieving schools, receive high quality training in engineering and construction.
- Most teaching and learning in both theory and practical sessions is good; learners make good progress and receive excellent support to achieve their potential.
- Most learners on engineering and construction courses achieve their qualifications.
- Tutors' high expectations motivate learners who, as a result, develop excellent skills and high standards of work. Initial assessment is thorough and the tracking of learner progress is mostly good.
- A well-planned curriculum enables learners, from age 14 onwards, to access a wide range of engineering and construction programmes that collectively form multiple pathways for progression to higher learning or employment.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- The high numbers of apprentices achieving qualifications is recent and not yet sustained over time. A minority of apprentices following construction programmes complete after the allotted time.
- Not enough teaching and learning are outstanding. Target setting is not always thorough and the written commentary on learners' work does not contain sufficient detail to help them improve.
- Centralised recording and monitoring of aspects of provision such as the progress learners make in-year, actual destinations and the support learners receive, including safeguarding, is insufficient to give managers information on which to base plans for improvements.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is insufficient to prepare learners well for working sensitively in diverse communities and internationally.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Maintain the recent improvement in apprenticeship success rates, with a particular focus on the minority of construction programmes where too many learners fail to complete in the allocated time; by carefully monitoring learners' progress and ensuring that managers have sufficient information to take the appropriate interventions that will ensure apprentices achieve no later than expected.
- Continue to develop the lesson observation system so that observers focus on what learners actually learn rather than what tutors teach, the progress they make in each lesson and whether every learner is, relative to their ability, stretched and challenged. Teaching strategies that promote stimulating not passive learning should be strongly encouraged.
- Improve the current staff appraisal system by ensuring that the outcomes of teaching and learning observations and the setting of individual staff targets are used together to contribute to staff appraisals.
- Promote equality and diversity more effectively in the workplace, the classroom and more widely across the provision by ensuring that learners develop a fuller understanding of issues that relate to them, the environments in which they will work and the challenges they will face working internationally.
- Take advantage of the many opportunities that naturally arise, to develop learners' mathematical skills, by using examples of calculations and quantities found in the engineering and construction industry. Increase tutors' focus on accurately correcting spelling, grammar and mathematical errors found in all learners' work.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Prospects' data indicate the proportion of apprentices who achieved their framework in 2012/13 improved significantly, to above the national rates for engineering and construction. The success rates for frameworks attained within the allotted time have also improved, although construction remains lower than engineering. The most recent data show an improvement from 2011/12, when a small minority of success rates were much lower and few learners in construction completed in the allocated time. Before 2012/13, Prospects did not have their own contract and worked as a subcontractor.
- Technical certificate pass rates are high in construction crafts and in engineering. Many learners achieve merit or distinction grades in their BTEC qualifications. Success rates for 16-18 year olds following vocational study programmes and English and mathematics qualifications are also high.
- Apprentices satisfactorily develop English and mathematical skills, but in observed lessons the primary focus is on English. However, a high proportion of apprenticeships successfully complete functional skills qualifications, many from a low starting point.
- Learners' attendance is high and punctuality is very good. The proportion of learners who remain on their programmes is improving and of the 238 apprentices who started in 2012/13, the vast majority are continuing. Contacting employers is routine, if for any reason, a learner fails to attend a lesson or a workshop activity.
- Learners make good progress and receive excellent support to achieve their potential. Engineering employers consistently praise learners for their high standards of work. However,

whilst local systems for monitoring progress are effective, there are no cross-organisation systems for collating this information to notify senior leaders and managers of learners' performance.

- Achievement gaps have closed between the few female learners, learners from minority ethnic backgrounds and the vast majority of learners who are male and of white British heritage. Success rates for around two thirds of learners who come from areas of relatively low socio-economic deprivation are comparable with other learners.
- Many learners accepted onto an apprenticeship programme with low basic skills make good progress. For example, 10 out of 17 learners on the mathematics unit of an advanced-level qualification achieved high grades.
- Learners develop excellent skills and the standard of apprentices' work is very high. The expectation is that learners are punctual and develop the attitudes and skills required by employers. Learners with difficulties outside of the learning environment receive excellent personal support with most progressing to higher levels of training or sustainable employment.
- Progression to higher-level qualifications and sustainable employment is mostly good. Prospects use their extensive links with local and national employers highly effectively to ensure that all apprentices find employment before they commence their programme.
- Prospects' data indicate that almost all apprentices gain a job or progress to an advanced apprenticeship. However, in construction a third of learners' destinations are unknown with a small minority unemployed. Most learners on a 16-18 study programme progress to a higher-level course.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching and learning are consistently good, accurately reflecting learners' high achievements last year. In taught sessions, learners benefit from well-planned lessons and the training at work is well structured. Training builds well on learners' prior knowledge and experiences, and tutors have a good knowledge of the types of work apprentices carry out.
- Relationships with employers are good. Tutors manage effectively both on and off-the-job training and assessment. In a few lessons, tutors talk too much and do not challenge learners sufficiently. For example, activities that would enable learners to demonstrate what they have learned or to explore their understanding in more depth. Even in the better lessons, learners often spend too much time copying down notes or drawings from a presentation.
- Prospects works with a diverse group of learners, ranging from year 10 and 11 school pupils to apprentices. Most are aged 16-19, employed by large national companies in the rail and aerospace industries. School pupils, including both high achievers and those excluded from school are welcomed. Learners benefit from highly personalised programmes, designed to meet their needs and increase future chances of sustainable employment. Learners benefit from the high expectations of staff.
- The importance of learners attending classes on time and being prepared to study is central to Prospects' strong work ethic. Employers work very closely with Prospects and many use them to assist with the recruitment of their employees. Once enrolled at Prospects, learners receive good quality academic guidance and pastoral support. Most learners with barriers to learning ultimately succeed and progress to higher qualifications or to employment.
- The initial assessment of learners' skills is very good. Employer and Prospects' staff interviews, combined with diagnostic tests, establish a learner's motivation for training and their English and mathematics skills. Following the offer of a placement, Prospects conduct additional assessments to create individual learning plans. To supplement this, Prospects routinely receive information on learners' past support needs, psychological assessments or known medical

issues. The information received is generally of good quality and used to create individual support plans, ultimately shared with appropriate staff including tutors.

- The feedback learners receive on the quality of their practical work and assessment is good. It helps them understand what they have done well and what to do to improve. In practical sessions, verbal feedback is clear and helpful. Feedback on written work often lacks detail and does not always explain clearly what a learner must do to improve. Apprenticeship progress reviews are generally good with helpful discussions that cover all aspects of the qualification framework. Employers are involved in reviews, but some of the targets set are not specific enough and they do not adequately challenge learners.
- The development of learners' English skills is good. In many vocational lessons, the recording of key words on flip charts is routine and tutors encourage discussions about correct spellings and the use of grammar. Tutors help learners to learn and gain an understanding of correct technical terms, by labelling diagrams and watching demonstrations. However, there are many missed opportunities to develop learners' mathematical skills in both the classroom and the workplace. For example, tutors make limited attempts to link the taught topic to everyday examples in the industry. The teaching and assessment of functional skills is good. Learners correctly follow the level of functional skills relevant to the requirements of their apprenticeship and their ability. Most make good progress over time.
- Learners receive a good range of advice and guidance through all stages of their programme. To widen horizons and opportunities, school pupils from a wide range of schools attend Prospects' open days. Advice is objective and helpful in assisting pupils to decide whether an apprenticeship might be a more appropriate route than established academic pathways. After interview and assessment, learners receive advice on suitable options. Learners coming to the end of their programme can access good guidance on possible progression opportunities.
- The promotion of equality and diversity is insufficient. Learners are safe in the workplace, but opportunities for them to explore equality and diversity issues in depth are rare. Few observed lessons managed to highlight, in any form, typical issues that learners might encounter in their working life. For example, coping with diverse customer needs and expectations they may encounter working in the engineering and construction industries.

Engineering

16-19 study programmes Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching learning and assessment are good. Success rates are high on the majority of courses with most learners progressing to higher-level courses or relevant employment. Apprentices develop good practical skills and gain a thorough understanding of key theoretical concepts.
- Tutors have good vocational knowledge and use their skills and experience effectively to motivate and support learners. Tutors have high expectations of their learners, and set demanding standards. Learners often produce work that is above the requirements of the awarding body and the level of the course. Well-tailored courses meet the needs of individuals and employers' requirements.
- Teaching in practical lessons is good. Apprentices use engineering and electrical tools and equipment well. Observance of health and safety rules is of a very high standard. In both electrical and mechanical sessions, apprentices produce test pieces to high standards. Tutors provide good coaching and help learners achieve the high expectations of their employers. In some practical sessions, assessors give insufficient written feedback to learners on their written work.

- Theory teaching is good. Because of well-planned sessions, attendance is very high and learners enjoy coming to Prospects. Teaching materials are of high quality with some good use of interactive learning technology and visual aids. In the better lessons, tutors encourage independent learning, but in the less effective sessions they do not involve learners sufficiently.
- Assessment in the workplace is good, and is by direct observation and witness testimony. Learners are aware of how to improve and produce good evidence in their portfolios. A small minority of learners receive insufficient feedback on portfolio content.
- Resources to support teaching and learning are very good. Engineering workshops are well equipped and replicate an authentic workplace environment. In some companies, on-the-job resources are outstanding. At the airport learners work on modern civilian aircraft, whilst other apprentices assist with the manufacture of high specification robotics.
- The process for reviewing apprentices' progress is good. Although the formal review is every 12 weeks, visits take place every month. The setting of challenging long-term targets is routine, but some short-term targets are not specific or sufficiently demanding. Employers are fully involved in the review process and assessor tracking of learners' progress is good.
- Initial assessment is thorough. Apprentices generally receive good advice guidance and support from employers, tutors and assessors. The quality of care, support and guidance provided by all Prospects' staff is very good. Apprentices receive comprehensive pre-course information and the induction programme is very thorough.
- The development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills is good. Apprentices who require additional English and mathematics or for example support for dyslexia, receive excellent help. In many portfolios however, errors in punctuation and grammar remain unchecked or corrected.
- The promotion or reinforcement of equality and diversity is insufficient, in most lessons and progress reviews. For example, learners do not routinely develop their knowledge to prepare them for working in culturally diverse environments or with global employers.

Construction and Building Services

16-19 study programmes Apprenticeships

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment in construction crafts and building services are good, reflecting the much-improved achievements in 2012/13. In the previous year however, success rates were lower and while the number of learners completing in the allocated time has increased, it remains an area for improvement. Learners work hard and develop good craft and employability skills both in lessons and at work. Most demonstrate very good technical knowledge of their trade and wider aspects of the construction industry. Learners work well in teams and communicate effectively. Learners' attendance is good; tutors and assessors follow up absence on a daily basis.
- Learners work confidently. Most produce excellent standards of work in plumbing, electrical, carpentry and brickwork and are highly valued by their employers. Tutors and assessors challenge learners to develop their skills further, by encouraging them to describe tasks completed, what they learned from the process and how they might improve. Apprentices receive more assessor review visits than required by the contract. Closer monitoring of apprentices and better setting of targets is contributing to improved success rates and learner progress. Learners value in-depth discussion as much as detailed written targets.
- Tutors and assessors use their considerable industrial experience well to plan learning and assessment. To meet qualification standards assessors use assessment plans, however these

vary in detail and are not consistent. The use of questioning to check learners' knowledge in the workplace is good. Most learners respond well to this approach and value the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Prospects' excellent spacious and well-resourced learning environments enable learners to practise and improve their skills.

- Tutors and assessors monitor learners' progress accurately through individual tracking sheets. However, assessors do not have access to a centralised tracking system to support more effective management of learner performance and progress. Assessment of learners' work is good. Assessors routinely check the standards of practical and written work and offer regular advice on how to improve.
- The checking of learners' spelling and grammar in portfolios and job related evidence sheets is routine. Because of tutor encouragement, most apprentices word process their written work. The impact on improving grammar and spelling is evident in submitted work. However, there are often missed opportunities to demonstrate the use of mathematics at work.
- Learners receive good pre-course advice and guidance. The application process is thorough and ensures the placement of learners on programmes, best suited to their needs and interests. Because of improved initial assessment, learners receive good functional skills support with a minority achieving early. Tutors and assessors do not promote equality and diversity sufficiently. Every month there is a different topic, but the level of discussion with the apprentice is often superficial and misses many opportunities to relate topics to the workplace.
- Promotion of safe working practices is outstanding. Learners have an excellent understanding of health and safety relevant to the workplace. For example, most employers require the wearing of gloves and eye protection at all times. Learners work towards their construction skills certification scheme card, this increases their safety awareness and employability skills at work.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Management is good, but leadership is outstanding. Leadership is characterised by an ambitious vision and commitment to improving the quality and availability of engineering and construction apprenticeships in the locality and nationally. Strong relationships with local employers help create more job opportunities. The vision translates to high expectations for all learners and staff, but it particularly benefits young people living in areas of deprivation and schools with low attainment.
- The reorganisation of Prospects in 2012 had a single objective, the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. An increased focus on the observation of learning and giving middle managers more responsibility, improved communications and understanding, particularly between teaching staff and senior managers. Managers work to ambitious targets. Monitoring and support for learners at risk of not achieving by their planned date has improved significantly. Consequently, teaching and learning is now mostly good and learner outcomes have improved substantially.
- The Board of Trustees understand the company's values well, and use their own industrial and educational experience to guide strategic planning. They challenge the executive effectively to ensure that plans best fit the needs of employers and learners. Trustees gain a deeper understanding of the learner experience through taking part in themed learning walks.
- Through the introduction of more comprehensive performance management strategies, teaching and learning has improved. The measures include careful monitoring of observation grades so that all tutors not achieving good lessons consistently receive support. Managers always take more stringent actions if standards do not improve. Managers use observation outcomes well to plan relevant staff training sessions. The appraisal system however, is disjointed and does not sufficiently link together the effectiveness of teaching performance, staff targets and learner outcomes.

- Managers do not have access to central systems to effectively monitor and evaluate all aspects of provision. Examples include, the progress learners make in-year, detailed destination data and the impact of learning support and safeguarding interventions. While individual tutors and support staff know their learners well and have a good understanding of their individual needs, much information is localised and not readily available for managers to improve provision further.
- Staff development arrangements are good and focus strongly on improving the learners' experience. Managers insist that all tutors have a recognised teaching qualification at level 5 within two years of starting their job. Tutors are required to take an initial assessment in English and mathematics at level 2 and receive support if required. As a result, most tutors are confident in assessing and developing these skills for learners.
- Self-assessment is largely accurate, although managers make insufficient use of historical data to map their rate of progress since the reorganisation. Staff are fully involved in the self-assessment process, but information gathered from employers and learners is not recorded formally. The quality improvement plan, based firmly on self-assessment, is detailed. Managers update the plan weekly and prioritise the actions taken to maximise the benefit to learners.
- Leaders and managers maintain partnerships with local and national organisations well and are very responsive to their needs. These benefit learners by providing increased employment opportunities, access to good resources and up-to-date and relevant information about industries' needs.
- The planning of the curriculum is very good. In most cases, and especially with new programmes such as those in aviation and railways, employers work very closely with managers to devise activities that match industry needs. Study programmes for learners planning to enter apprenticeships prepare them well. Most tutors now assess their learners in the workplace as well as at Prospects, resulting in greater coherence of off- and on-the-job training.
- The promotion of equality and diversity are adequate. Leaders and managers ensure that all publicity material is inclusive, and shows positive images of women, who are under-represented in these industries, and learners from minority ethnic heritage. Female tutors act as good role models. Managers analyse data carefully to ensure that they have no gaps in achievement between different groups of learners.
- Prospects fulfils its statutory duty to safeguard learners. Named members of staff have overall responsibility for safeguarding, and have good links with appropriate external organisations to provide prompt help when it is required. The safety of learners on site and in workshops is a high priority for all staff.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Prospects Learning Foundation Limited

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-19 study programmes	Apprenticeships
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
Engineering	2
Construction Crafts	2
Building Services	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: 819								
	Part-time: 0								
Principal/CEO	Neil Bates								
Date of previous inspection	25 March 2003								
Website address	www.prospectscollege.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	73	2	31	N/A	6	12	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	0	0	0	N/A	0	0	N/A	N/A	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+			
	266	48	276	105	0	0			
Number of learners aged 14-16	37								
Full-time	0								
Part-time	37								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ None								

Contextual information

Prospects Learning Foundation is a large and rapidly expanding further education and skills provider based in Essex, in the heart of the Thames Gateway. It has charitable status and comprises three specialist skills training centres focused on engineering (including rail), construction and building services and aviation. Prospects' main colleges are located at Basildon and Southend, but they also run a 14-19 vocational training centre located on Canvey Island in partnership with others and sponsor a local school. Groups of learners reflect the different local populations that it serves, with the vast majority male and of white British heritage. Prospects targets young people from disadvantaged areas in the local community. Approximately two thirds of learners come from areas of deprivation higher than UK national average; many with low skills in mathematics and English.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector	Michael Davis
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Seven additional inspectors, assisted by the executive manager (strategy, policy and performance) 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>

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