

Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		11–14 March 2014
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:

- Both retention and achievement rates are high.
- Learners develop good personal and employability skills.
- Well-planned learning sessions improve learners' English and mathematics skills.
- Good care and support for learners is provided by tutors.
- Initial assessment is particularly well focused and recorded.
- Good quality work is produced by learners in both practical and theory sessions.
- Good verbal feedback during learning sessions helps learners progress and develop well.
- Very effective arrangements are in place to manage and monitor subcontractor performance.
- Good networking arrangements ensure organisational strategies meet local and national needs.
- Self-assessment is very well understood and is a fully inclusive process.
- Very rigorous quality systems are well linked to performance management.
- Feedback is being used particularly well to improve learners' experiences.
- A large commitment is made to staff development and job progression.
- A good range of initiatives has widened learner participation.
- Equality and diversity is embedded well in the majority of learning sessions.
- Safeguarding is particularly well managed and reinforced to both staff and learners.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- Functional skills achievement rates are not high enough.
- Not all learners have the opportunity to experience real work environments.
- Planning and implementation of some sessions does not always challenge the more able learners.
- Methods for giving written feedback on learners' work are not consistent.
- Some aspects of data management are under-developed.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Share best practice across Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited (Brighter Futures) and subcontractors at tutor level to plan and develop sufficiently challenging activities within learning sessions for the more able learners. In addition, share best practice with subcontractors to help them understand the learning styles and meet the support needs of individual learners, such as those with behavioural problems and dyslexia.
- Routinely analyse data relating to mathematics and English and personal and social development starting points and establish the distance the learner has travelled. Adopt the best practice which is used to record other key programme data.
- Develop a consistent approach to teaching functional skills and build upon where the integration of functional skills within vocational sessions has been successful to raise achievement rates. Share best practice between tutors and subcontractors.
- Work with employers to agree longer periods of work-taster experience in the workplace. Provide a broader range of opportunities for real work environments for all learners.
- Review and develop the internal verification process to ensure learners' portfolio work is more closely sampled. Produce better quality written feedback for learners on their work.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- The very large majority of learners achieve the core aim of their study programmes. In 2012/13 qualification achievement and retention rates in almost all curriculum areas were high and well above the national rate. Learners undertake a challenging programme of relevant qualifications and success rates are high. However, functional skills success rates are still too low with data not being systematically and routinely analysed to establish learners' progress in this area.
- Learner attendance has improved significantly since last year and classroom sessions are now well-attended. Participation across Brighter Futures and subcontractors is well monitored through comprehensive management-information systems. Learners are motivated by incentives and managers are quick to respond to absence. Lateness in class is managed well and learners make good progress. Consequently, the standard of their work is good.
- Initial assessment is thorough and enables tutors to combine individual suites of qualifications, which are carefully selected to challenge all learners based on their starting points. Learners acquire a good range of information about industry and develop skills to help them gain employment.
- Data relating to the different groups of learners is very closely monitored and no significant differences between the achievement and retention rates of learners from different groups exist. Learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve equally as well as other learners.
- Learners develop good personal and employability skills and gain in confidence throughout the programme. Learners enjoy their training sessions, are very well-behaved and motivated by the one-to-one support provided by their tutors. A significant number of learners arrive at Brighter Futures with behavioural difficulties and are enabled to improve their behaviour and act in a more appropriate and professional manner.
- A wide variety of enrichment activities are in place, which learners particularly enjoy. Examples include guest speakers who talk about addiction, health issues and crime prevention. Day visits to local art galleries take place. Learners develop and improve their English and mathematical skills through well-planned sessions and are encouraged to learn independently.

- Learner progression in to further education, training or employment so far in 2013/14 has improved and is at a satisfactory rate. Brighter Futures and its subcontractors use work placements very effectively to provide learners with valuable experience to apply and further develop their employability skills and is very careful to place learners only when they are ready to ensure that the experience is appropriate and positive. Employers are supportive and set learners challenging but achievable tasks. However, a small minority of learners do not have the opportunity to experience a 'real working' environment and there is not enough opportunity for the more capable learners to spend longer periods of time in the workplace. The current employers are very supportive of the programme and provide a good environment for learners to practise new skills.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment at Brighter Futures is good and this reflects the good outcomes for learners. Learners benefit from good care and support from their tutors, which assist them greatly in reaching their learning aims. Tutors develop close relationships with learners and understand their personal circumstances well. Learners respond by attending well and remaining on programmes. The patience, commitment and enthusiasm of staff at Brighter Futures motivate learners well. Learners' behaviour is excellent.
- Tutors have extensive industry experience and plan learning sessions effectively. Relevant and topical subjects, such as the impact of smoking on national no smoking day, are covered. Using a variety of interesting and engaging teaching methods, learners are able to develop a good range of vocational and technical skills. However, the planning and implementation of extension activities that challenge and stretch the more able learners in sessions is inconsistent. In the better sessions learners are encouraged to reinforce and build on their learning by selecting mathematical tasks to take home, and in the less effective sessions the tutor does not plan sufficiently challenging activities for the more capable learners.
- The use of facilities, equipment and resources are good and help to consolidate learning. For example, learners have a dedicated training floor in the Brighter Futures building, which includes an information and communication technology suite, and a comfortable breakout area with sofas. A large proportion of learners benefit from teaching during their access to a rural farm through a subcontractor. The farm has a range of small animals, horses, an all weather ménage, and a horticultural area with a large poly-tunnel. Also, there is a commercial hair salon that is open to the public for the hairdressing diploma learners. The farm and salon provide excellent 'real working' environments. Learners particularly value the variety and opportunity the range of subcontractors gives them.
- Initial assessment is thorough and well documented. All learners have a meaningful individual learning plan in which short-term and long-term targets are set, monitored and reviewed regularly. Additional support needs are identified well and followed through into reviews and teaching sessions. Throughout the duration of the programme, learners with additional support requirements receive close monitoring of attendance, personal skills development, achievement of learning aims and outcomes to ensure all their needs are met.
- Assessments and reviews of learners' work are carried out well and regularly monitored by the management team to ensure a consistency in approach. Learners particularly value the opportunities the frequent reviews give to discuss both their progress and personal issues. Clear learning and personal targets are set and previous targets well reviewed. Learners receive good verbal feedback during the sessions, which helps them progress and develop their knowledge and skills. The quality of learners' work produced in the sessions and in portfolios is good. However, the quality, volume and detail of the written feedback given to learners on their portfolio work are inconsistent. Tutors do not always help learners understand what they need to do to improve.
- The majority of learners develop and improve their English and mathematical skills through well-planned sessions. Learning is embedded and contextualised into vocational sessions and in

discrete sessions; staff use their experience to promote both group and independent learning. Learners are asked to select tasks which suit their own level and English and mathematical extension tasks are available for the more capable learners.

- Information, advice and guidance for learners are excellent. They are introduced during their induction to Brighter Futures and the learners benefit from a weekly schedule of extra-curricular activities to help them meet their programme aims and identify other potential career options. External support needs are identified and learners can receive financial help with clothes, for interviews, and travel passes, to assist in attendance.
- Equality and diversity is discussed and well promoted at each learner review. Equality and diversity is embedded well in the majority of learning sessions. Good contextualisation of equality and diversity takes place in these learning sessions. Tutors at Brighter Futures make good use of a five-minute learning session plan to help them understand the learning styles and meet the support needs of individual learners such as those suffering from behavioural problems and dyslexia.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior managers and the directors of Brighter Futures have positive and passionate views on how to support both learners and the local economy and help their staff progress. Strategies are developed annually to ensure young people can be supported to progress either through the direct provision of Brighter Futures or through a carefully selected group of well-managed subcontractor partners. Staff are encouraged to communicate their suggestions and ideas through dedicated business development days. Opportunities to have an input in to the business direction are highly valued by staff. Strategies to meet both local needs and the needs of the learners include the decision to separate Brighter Futures from its parent organisation in order to encourage the participation of new learners and establish clearer pathways for learners to progress from study programmes to traineeships and apprenticeships. The integration and teaching of English and mathematical skills is also a key strategic priority for Brighter Futures.
- Performance management of staff and the business is a particularly high priority for Brighter Futures. Heavily dependent on subcontractors, the management of these is excellent, with a range of performance and observation measures in place to ensure that learners receive a good experience during their training programmes. Extensive checks prior to subcontractor recruitment are in place and a range of performance measures, which include scheduled observation, unannounced observation and thorough data recovery, are in place. Inspectors identified good examples of under-performing subcontractors being replaced but not before attempts to improve performance had been made.
- Staff personal objectives are very clearly aligned to the organisation's key business objectives and regular individual meetings review staff performance. Highly effective monitoring of staff performance by observation, with a clear focus on the teaching and learning and the learner progress review processes, is an integral part of staff-performance management and development. Staff access a particularly wide range of development activity and managers encourage staff to progress within the business.
- Quality systems and processes underpin all the Brighter Futures' activity and are closely linked to business plan objectives. An annual quality activity plan clearly identifies key activity throughout the year. All staff are well aware of their areas of responsibility and are closely monitored to ensure particularly that the monitoring of a range of activity takes place in a timely and developmental manner. Internal verification is well managed and drives learner progress. However, some inconsistencies lead to insufficient written feedback being given to some learners.
- Brighter Futures use data well to manage the performance of tutors and subcontractors. A wide variety of reports are analysed on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis. Reports highlight areas of improved performance and appropriate actions are being taken where under-performance is highlighted. Brighter Futures share best practice and currently all reports are being further

developed to allow for more easily accessible management information. However, managers do not routinely analyse data relating to the progress made by learners in their English and mathematics, personal and social development.

- Self-assessment is a particularly well-managed process within Brighter Futures. All stakeholders contribute and subcontractors play a full part in the gathering of evidence along with staff, employers and learners. The self-assessment report proved to be particularly accurate when compared to the findings of the inspection team. Self-assessment is very judgemental and self-critical and enables the subsequent quality improvement planning to be relevant and pertinent to the respective areas of training programme delivery and management. Data are used effectively to support judgements in the self-assessment report.
- Quality improvement plans are well-understood by all staff and subcontractors and are regularly monitored to ensure timely actions take place. Good practice is shared regularly and standardisation meetings take place which include staff and subcontractors. A wide range of feedback is gathered from learners, staff and employers and good examples of feedback leading to an improved learner experience were identified by inspectors. Examples of improvements following feedback include revisions to the learner induction programme, improvements to rest facilities in the training centre and better embedding of English and mathematical skills into the learning programmes.
- Networking at a range of levels by Brighter Futures' management team and staff ensures the organisation is at the forefront of both local and national initiatives and is well placed to react appropriately. Directors meet with local politicians, learning institutions and key partnership groups to keep in line with important policy decisions affecting learners and the provision. Through various training provider networks and events Brighter Futures very effectively shares and gains good practice. Gathering of local labour market intelligence ensures learners receive training which will lead to real jobs in the local area. An external member of the board ensures specialist knowledge and expertise is readily available.
- Equality and diversity is a key focus and priority for Brighter Futures. Well promoted and reinforced to staff and existing learners, a wide range of activity is taking place to widen the participation of under-represented groups. In order to remove some of the barriers to learners attending training, subcontractors have been selected for the diverse range of their provision and their location geographically. Training is delivered in the close-knit communities with intelligence being provided by careful analysis of application and recruitment data to identify areas of potential need. Work is taking place with minority ethnic community groups and homeless centres to help remove barriers and widen participation. Data are managed and interrogated well in respect of a range of equality and diversity information and the management information produced is well used to inspire initiatives.
- Good examples of barriers to learning being removed for learners with particular needs were identified by inspectors. Additional support by the provision, both physical resources and staff resources, for individuals is evident. Complaints within Brighter Futures are well managed and learners value the confidentiality and support given. Non acceptance of bullying and harassment is a key focus and awareness is raised regularly to ensure learners enjoy their time on programme.
- Brighter Futures meets its statutory requirements for the safeguarding of learners. Safeguarding arrangements at Brighter Futures are particularly good. Staff are well qualified and records are well maintained. Very good links are in place with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board which helps with staff development and training at Brighter Futures. Inspectors identified good examples of safeguarding issues being dealt with in a confidential and sympathetic manner and being very well recorded. Staff and learner reinforcement of safeguarding is well managed and subcontractors are particularly closely audited for their safeguarding arrangements. Learners feel safe and confident with their individual safety closely monitored from the initial advice and guidance stage of their training. Well-qualified staff carry out all initial health and safety visits to subcontractors and to Brighter Futures employer work-placement premises. E-safety is particularly well promoted and learners have a high level of awareness of the pitfalls of unguarded internet usage.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)**Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited**

Inspection grades are based on a provider's performance: 1: Outstanding 2: Good 3: Requires improvement 4: Inadequate	Overall	14-16 part-time provision	14-16 full-time provision	16-19 study programmes	Traineeships	19+ Learning programmes	Apprenticeships	Employability	Community learning
Overall effectiveness	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Outcomes for learners	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	N/A	N/A	2	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Employability training	2

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	16–18								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	Full-time: 131								
	Part-time: 399								
Principal/CEO	Ian Smith								
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected								
Website address	www.brighterfutures.uk.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	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Part-time	87	N/A	11	N/A	N/A	N/A	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+			
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	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	101								
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency (EFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alt Valley Community Trust Halton YMCA Vauxhall Neighbourhood Council Pinehirst Limited 								

Contextual information

Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited and Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited are trading entities, wholly owned by Evolve Business Services Limited and share services such as quality, health and safety, finance and administration. In September, 2012, Sysco Business Skills Academy novated its EFA contract to its newly formed sister company, Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited. Based in Liverpool, Brighter Futures employs 18 staff and provides the majority of its programmes in Merseyside. Four subcontractor partners provide the majority of Brighter Futures' training programmes.

Unemployment in the North West is higher than the country as a whole with Merseyside having amongst the highest unemployment rates in the region. The proportion of pupils leaving school with five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is below the national average.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Tim Hanson AI

Three additional inspectors, assisted by the Director of Operations 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 relevant 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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