

Options 2 Workplace Learning Ltd

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		2 – 5 December 2014
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Requires improvement-3
	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
Outcomes for learners		Requires improvement-3
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Requires improvement-3
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Requires improvement-3

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider requires improvement because:

- not enough apprentices complete the framework
- a minority of training and assessment sessions do not challenge apprentices sufficiently
- staff do not always use initial assessment to place apprentices on the appropriate programme level
- not enough targets set at training and assessment sessions are sufficiently precise
- careers guidance does not focus on promoting wider employment opportunities
- vocational trainers and assessors do not always embed functional skills successfully and learners' progress in information and communications technology (ICT) is often slow
- managers do not analyse data or monitor the impact of actions to improve training, learning and assessment sufficiently and this limits the value of self-assessment.

This provider has the following strengths:

- very good partnerships with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) other partners and employers that benefit apprentices and promote apprenticeships.
- the majority of apprentices, most of whom were unemployed before starting the programme, progress into full-time sustainable employment.
- assessment and review sessions are often strong and trainers and assessors develop apprentices' critical thinking and independent learning skills well
- assessors' feedback to apprentices is supportive and usually helpful in identifying actions to help them improve their vocational skills
- apprentices have good functional English skills and most are able to use mathematics to solve problems in the workplace
- a high proportion of apprentices have a good understanding of their responsibilities towards their customers under equality legislation.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- As numbers grow under new ownership, carefully monitor, analyse and evaluate data on the achievement of different groups and different aspects of the apprenticeship programme so that trends can be identified early and action taken where necessary in order to improve outcomes for apprentices.
- Further develop the process for the observation of teaching, learning and assessment so that it focuses clearly on how well apprentices learn, on the progress they make and the level of challenge they receive to perform to their full potential.
- Ensure that staff use initial assessment to place apprentices on a level of functional skills that challenges them, even if that level is higher than the framework requires. For administration apprenticeships, ensure that initial assessment includes ICT so that they receive enough preparation to make good progress and succeed more rapidly to gain the qualification in this area.
- Provide further training to enable staff to set challenging and realistic targets and embed functional skills, equality and diversity, employment rights and responsibilities and safeguarding successfully in vocational assessment.
- Give all apprentices good advice on potential careers and progression opportunities by regularly talking to them about their career plans and helping them to gain units and qualifications to aid their intentions and raise their aspirations to wider qualification and employment opportunities.
- Carefully monitor the effectiveness of targets and training so that apprentices make rapid progress through their qualifications and further develop their readiness for employment.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
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- Options 2 Workplace Learning Ltd (Options 2) provides apprenticeships in six vocational areas most of which are at intermediate level and a few at advanced level. The largest numbers are in administration, customer service, and ICT. These make up around a third of provision. The rest of the provision is for either unemployed adults or functional skills learners on short courses that are outside the scope for this inspection. Most learners reside in Northamptonshire, but a minority are in the West Midlands.
- Most apprentices who are currently on the programme make at least the progress expected of them, but a few do not make sufficient progress because they do not have enough challenge to achieve their potential. Those who have completed the framework have done so in the expected time and the progress of current apprentices indicates that outcomes will at least equal the low national rates for completion within the agreed time. The success rate was low in 2013/14, which was the first full year the company ran its own contract for apprenticeships, but at this inspection, the success rate reflects the national rate.
- The majority of tutors and assessors provide good support for learners to develop skills. For example, one learner moved from a functional skills course to an apprenticeship in supporting teaching and learning, and as a result attained a full-time job as a teaching assistant. Another apprentice with a disability rapidly gained confidence in talking to the public. Others are achieving high standards and gaining positions of responsibility in their companies.
- Most learners improve their functional skills in English, and assessors and tutors mark written work well and explain the rules governing correct grammar and spelling to help apprentices

understand how to correct their own mistakes. However, achievement of functional skills qualifications, especially in ICT, is slow.

- The rate of apprentices' progression into jobs and onto further education is high. Most apprentices are unemployed before beginning the programme, and most of those who complete the framework gain permanent employment in the company where they have served their apprenticeship. A minority leave early to enter further education or gain employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teaching learning and assessment require improvement and this is reflected in outcomes for apprenticeships, which have improved, and outcomes for advanced apprentices that are less positive.
- Apprentices have high aspirations and most wish to enter a higher-level apprenticeship or full-time employment at the end of their programmes. Employers benefit from the quality of apprentices' work. All employers provide a mentor to support apprentices in the workplace, but not all employers are involved directly in reviewing apprentices' progress. Staff support apprentices well. They visit the workplace frequently, often every three weeks, to monitor the progress of apprentices.
- Work-based training, assessment and review sessions are mostly strong and develop apprentices' independent learning skills well. In these sessions, apprentices progress through their vocational qualifications quickly and are able to work independently. For example, an intermediate administration apprentice has very good working knowledge of the logistics environment and understands the importance of providing excellent customer service and administration to support the employer's business needs. Trainers often skilfully develop apprentices' critical thinking and independent research skills and keep their apprentices motivated and inspired to study outside the allocated training time.
- In the less challenging training and assessment sessions, trainers focus insufficiently on practical activities to engage and interest apprentices and rely too much on them listening or answering questions. When apprentices struggle to identify a correct response, the trainer often provides the answer too quickly.
- Apprentices' attendance at induction programmes is high. The programmes clearly identify what apprentices need to do and most of them attend workshops to improve their functional English and mathematics. Initial assessment of English and mathematics is thorough, but in a very few cases apprentices are not on a programme high enough for their abilities. Staff do not assess apprentices' prior knowledge of ICT at the start of their training sufficiently, which stops those needing support receiving the help they need with this functional skill.
- Feedback to apprentices following assessment is mostly helpful in identifying actions to help them improve. Formal reviews of learners' progress take place regularly. Assessors visit more frequently to provide training and assess apprentices' knowledge. Assessors always set actions for apprentices following these visits, but targets are seldom precise or fully understood by apprentices. Too often, targets do not have challenging times within which to complete the action and this slows down learning for those who find independent research difficult.
- Apprentices have good functional English skills and most are able to use practical mathematics to solve problems in the workplace. Pass rates in functional English examinations are high, but progress in functional ICT for a high proportion of administration apprentices is slow and for too many, staff do not provide sufficient preparation for the final examination. Too many assessors do not embed the development of functional English and mathematics in workplace training, although managers provide regular training and sessions to share good practice in implementing this.

- Initial advice and guidance requires improvement. Assessors provide accurate and frequent information on the progress apprentices make towards completing their frameworks. However, advice and guidance on career opportunities for apprentices does not broaden their aspirations beyond the employer they are with for their apprenticeship.
- Most apprentices understand well their responsibilities towards customers under equality legislation and are aware of cultural and individual differences. Staff promote much of this at induction, and assessors discuss legal responsibilities during reviews. However, they do not embed employment rights, safeguarding, and equality and diversity tuition sufficiently in training and assessment sessions to improve apprentices' wider understanding, confidence and abilities to deal with potential issues and conflicts that may arise in the workplace.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement. Leaders and managers have a clear and ambitious vision that focuses well on helping young people and adults, many of whom have been unemployed before starting their training, to achieve good employability and functional skills, and move into apprenticeships and on to sustainable employment. At inspection, the provider was changing ownership in order to increase its capacity to provide training and assessment, and monitor quality improvement plans. Leaders and managers from both companies cooperate well to ensure that employers and apprentices are not at a disadvantage through the transition period.
- Managers and staff maintain particularly good partnerships that benefit apprentices. For example, innovative work with LEPs has resulted in a pilot in the West Midlands to make apprenticeships more attractive by moving apprentices on a three monthly cycle around four different employers. This gives the apprentices wider experience of job opportunities while they gain their qualifications. Managers in Northampton give regular presentations and advice in local secondary schools to encourage more young people to consider apprenticeships as a positive way of moving to employment.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. Managers collect accurate data, and during inspection, could collate it quickly to identify the performance of apprentices. However, they do not analyse the performance of different apprenticeship pathways and functional skills sufficiently or on a regular basis to make a clear evaluation of the provision in the self-assessment report. Too many of the strengths in the report are normal practice. However, the quality improvement plan identifies accurately many of the areas for improvement found by inspectors.
- Managers keep clear records of the progress made by all apprentices and review these fortnightly to help them plan for apprentices to complete their programme in the allotted time. This is increasingly successful in helping most learners to make expected progress. However, they do not monitor targets on reviews or assessed work sufficiently to ensure that all tutors and assessors are challenging apprentices to complete work as quickly as they can.
- Managers use effective performance management to tackle staff underperformance promptly. Managers give good support to help staff develop their skills, and take appropriate action if their work does not improve sufficiently after this support.
- Observation of teaching, learning and assessment records are appropriately evaluative, and judgements match the grades. All tutors benefit from an ungraded observation within their first month to judge whether it is appropriate for them to continue teaching and assessing and to identify development activities. Observers make judgements on the quality of learning although this needs further development. Both assessors and tutors benefit from clear actions to help them improve.
- Managers identify good practice through observations and reviews. At quarterly training meetings, staff share this practice and explore a range of topics which require improvement,

such as setting realistically time-bound, specific targets and developing mathematics and English in vocational training and assessment. However, managers do not monitor the impact of this sufficiently to ensure that all staff implement the improvements. The increased capacity that results from the new ownership has begun to resolve this with the appointment of a teaching and learning coach and quality team although it is too early to judge the impact of these arrangements.

- Managers appraise staff rigorously. Appraisal records have detailed and thorough feedback, stemming from discussions between managers and staff and the use of good evidence. This helps staff to perform better and understand the high standards expected of them. Functional skills tutors have appropriate teaching qualifications, and most trainers have achieved an introductory teaching award.
- Managers plan apprenticeships that match local employment needs, in particular, warehousing, administration and customer service. While this leads to many apprentices progressing to employment, staff do not indicate further training sufficiently. All staff are skilled at raising the aspirations of unemployed people to find employment, but do not always challenge them enough to aspire to higher levels.
- Apprentices have a good understanding of diversity and respect other people from a range of backgrounds in the workplace. They answer questions on issues around equality at all reviews. Managers and staff promote equality adequately to protect learners from bullying and harassment, and to help them understand what to do if they or others are subject to discriminatory behaviour. However, the good introduction they receive from tutors at induction does not receive sufficient reinforcement or promotion throughout their training.
- Safeguarding is good. As well as complying with all relevant legislation, managers take prompt, appropriate and well-documented actions to safeguard all apprentices. The nominated manager for safeguarding has good links with the local authority designated officer, so that referrals for expert help take place readily. Staff assess risk at all workplaces. All staff have appropriate training to be aware of behaviour that may indicate that apprentices are at risk, and managers review the progress of these learners fortnightly in order to keep them safe and making progress.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Options 2 Workplace Learning Ltd

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	3						3		
Outcomes for learners	3						3		
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3						3		
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3						3		

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Administration	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider								
Age range of learners	19+								
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	86								
Principal/CEO	Mr S Morgan, Mrs J Wise								
Date of previous inspection	N/A								
Website address	www.options2.net								
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+	
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher				
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18		19+		
	27	31	5	8					
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total				
	N/A		N/A		N/A				
Number of learners aged 14-16	0								
Full-time	N/A								
Part-time	N/A								
Number of community learners	N/A								
Number of employability learners	N/A								
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<div> <div></div> <div>N/A</div> </div>								

Contextual information

Options 2 was established in 2005 and it is based in Northampton. It offers short courses in functional skills and to unemployed people and gained its first direct contract for apprenticeships in 2012. Most learners are in Northamptonshire, where unemployment rates range from low in the south to high in the north of the county. The inspection took place in a period of handover to a new owner, e-Response, who have much larger provision with learners across the country, although most are in the Midlands. e-Response had owned the company for nine days at the beginning of the inspection and the apprentices who start their programme from the end of the four-week transition period will be e-Response's first direct contract with the SFA.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Pauline Hawkesford AI

Two additional inspectors, assisted by the commercial director of e-Response as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last eighteen months 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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