

Westward Pathfinder

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates		2–5 June 2015
Overall effectiveness	This inspection:	Good-2
	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement-3
Outcomes for learners		Good-2
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment		Good-2
Effectiveness of leadership and management		Good-2

Summary of key findings for learners

This provider is good because:

- a high proportion of learners are successful in gaining their qualifications
- learners develop good social and personal skills, and develop their confidence and self-esteem so that they are ready for job interviews and subsequent employment
- the majority of learners progress into further training, voluntary work or paid employment
- well-qualified and experienced staff provide a high level of care and support, enabling nearly all learners to reach their full potential
- leaders and managers plan the provision well to meet the diverse needs of learners and the particular vocational needs of employers
- managers use data very effectively to identify learners at risk of not completing and to manage the performance of staff.

This is not yet an outstanding provider because:

- a small minority of learners are not sufficiently challenged to achieve their full potential
- not all learners have specific and measurable personal targets that are recorded and monitored appropriately
- not all learners receive sufficient useful written feedback following assessment
- vocational learners do not routinely develop English and mathematical skills.

Full report

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all tutors plan sessions in detail so that learners are challenged to do their very best.
- Ensure that tutors record learners' personal targets and monitor progress towards their completion.
- Improve the quality of written feedback to learners so that learners have a better understanding of what they need to do to improve.
- Ensure that all vocational tutors routinely develop learners' English and mathematical skills.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Good
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- Westward Pathfinder (WP) provides a variety of classroom-based courses including life and living skills, information and communication technology (ICT), English and mathematics. It also offers workplace learning and a few apprenticeships. The inspection covered the provision funded directly by the Skills Funding Agency which currently forms a minor part of WP's work. The large majority of learners are on employability programmes and are based mainly in South and North Devon.
- Success rates are high. The proportion of learners who achieved their key objectives in the last complete year improved and was comparable to other similar organisations. At the time of inspection, success rates have improved further and are now significantly better than the national average. There are no differences in success rates between the various courses. Nearly all learners achieve within the planned end date.
- Learners make good progress in developing the vocational skills they need to meet the needs of potential employers and to be ready for job interviews. Many learners have low-level skills in English and mathematics when starting with WP and nearly all learners improve these skills significantly. Managers negotiate with local employers to design courses which enable learners to develop the particular skills needed for the job.
- The standard of learners' work is good. Written work in portfolios is detailed and demonstrates a good understanding of the subject matter; for example, a learner produced an in-depth analysis of the impact of dementia upon the family.
- Most learners develop good personal and social skills. Many learners have significant barriers to learning, lack confidence and have poor self-esteem. The support and care offered by the staff enable learners to overcome such barriers and to present themselves with confidence. Learners feel more able to cope with job interviews and to be appropriately assertive in the workplace. Employers report that employees become much more competent after completing their course.
- Managers check performance data regularly to identify gaps in achievement between different learner groups. The differences between these groups are very small. About a third of learners have a learning difficulty and/or disability or mental health issue; these learners make good progress and achieve as well other learners.
- Most learners progress on to further courses or into paid employment or voluntary work. Staff work hard to keep in contact with learners and successfully obtain data relating to progression and sustainable employment. Many learners have progressed from entry level to higher level qualifications that lead to secure employment.

The quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, resulting in good outcomes for learners.
- Tutors care about their learners and generally have high expectations of them. They recognise that many learners have had poor educational experiences in the past. Tutors work hard and encourage and support learners very effectively; this results in learners making good progress with their self-confidence and improving their social interaction and communication skills.
- Learners have a particularly good relationship with their tutors and enjoy their courses. Tutors motivate learners well in developing a greater awareness of the requirements of the world of work.
- Staff are well qualified and experienced in their specialist area. Tutors provide a high level of care and support to enable nearly all learners to reach their full potential. They plan thorough and systematic approaches to learning which take good account of individual differences, personal and work situations and how learners learn best. However, at times, tutors do not plan in sufficient detail to challenge all learners well enough so that they develop their skills to their full ability rather than solely meeting the requirements of the qualification.
- Learning materials are mostly of a good quality. Most tutors use written learning materials well to meet the specific needs of individual learners. Learners benefit from working on resources which address current local and national issues and relevant workplace scenarios.
- Learners use information and learning technology confidently as a resource to enhance their English and mathematics learning and use online resources well for further independent study so they make faster progress.
- Tutors assess learners' prior knowledge and skills well at the start of their programmes to ensure that they are on the most appropriate course. Learners are enthusiastic about their learning and improve their skills by acting on the detailed verbal feedback they receive from tutors.
- However, too much written feedback, particularly for workplace learners, is far too brief to enable learners to understand clearly how they can improve or to widen their knowledge. Tutors discuss progress towards personal and non-accredited learning goals with learners informally, but do not always record this on their independent learning plans.
- Target setting has improved since the previous inspection and is now good. Learners negotiate clear, specific, short term targets which meet their individual needs well and enhance their prospects of gaining sustainable employment. Their targets have a clear emphasis on the skills required in the workplace rather than solely meeting the requirements of the awarding body. However, in a minority of cases, targets do little to stretch learners and are too broad for them to be able to evaluate effectively their own progress in improving their skills.
- Although WP staff assess learners' English and mathematics at the start of their course, this information is not always included in the individual learning plans. Learners recognise how improved mathematical and English skills enable them to make better progress at work, but tutors do not routinely correct spelling and grammar on all written work. Tutors delivering vocational courses do not always recognise the importance of developing and reinforcing English and mathematics skills within a vocational context, so a few learners with low level skills do not improve these skills quickly enough.
- Learners receive good information, advice and guidance at the start of their courses. Where necessary, tutors refer learners to other agencies for additional help with individual circumstances. Learners receive clear advice from tutors about possible roles and promotion routes in the workplace. WP managers have developed good links with Jobcentre Plus and use these well to enable learners to be ready for employment. However, learners do not routinely receive effective careers guidance and support at the end of their learning programmes.

- Tutors promote equality and diversity appropriately; this is an improvement from the previous inspection. Most learners gain a wider understanding of diversity in the workplace and in modern society. They value highly the strong emphasis on the culture of mutual respect with peers and tutors in the centre. In ICT sessions, tutors design exercises to widen learners' understanding of different cultures. In an English lesson, learners reviewed differing viewpoints of an incident reported in newspapers in the course of developing their persuasive writing skills.

The effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leadership and management are very effective. Senior managers have a clear vision of how the provision needs to be developed to meet the financial challenges facing the sector. They have established a clear strategic plan which focuses well on the needs of the learners and enables them to achieve their potential. Managers shared this plan with staff in an open consultation and responded with sensitivity to staff opinions.
- The board of trustees has an excellent working knowledge of the organisation. Trustees provide good support for senior managers, as well as constructive critical appraisal. Managers set demanding, but realistic, targets for the organisation.
- Management of staff performance is very good. Each staff member has a development plan to improve their performance. Managers set challenging targets for each staff member which are reviewed regularly; they deal with any under performance in a supportive manner.
- Procedures to assure the quality of the provision are robust and effective. Managers have developed a system for observations of teaching and learning which provide a good focus on the learning experience. They use the results from these detailed observations well to contribute to the development plan of each tutor. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and most sessions are now good or better. Other arrangements to improve quality are now well established and effectively improving success rates.
- Staff and learners contribute well to the self-assessment report. Data are accurate and staff use them well to make judgements about the quality of the provision and to identify areas for improvement. The self-assessment report is well written, critical and identifies all the major areas for improvement. It relates well to the quality improvement plan; managers review the plan at each senior management meeting and use it well as a tool to plan and monitor improvements in the provision.
- Staff plan the courses well to ensure that they meet the diverse needs of learners. They research the needs of the community and employers so that courses prepare learners well for local job opportunities. WP uses different funding streams imaginatively to facilitate progression from one course to another.
- Partnership working is excellent. Senior staff manage subcontractors very well. WP works very well alongside Jobcentre Plus to offer bespoke employability programmes to meet the needs of unemployed learners and the specific professional needs of employers. For example, WP offered a very well designed course to enable learners to gain the relevant vocational and employability skills for potential employment at a new large local hotel.
- The management of equality and diversity is good. All tutors have received excellent training on how to embed equality and diversity into their lessons, and they use this very effectively. Learners receive detailed information through electronic packages which they are required to complete as part of their induction. Equality and diversity are promoted well within the teaching of the courses. Learners have a good understanding of equality and diversity, especially learners in the workplace.
- Safeguarding is good. Each member of staff completes an electronic safeguarding training package each year, as well as receiving updates on safeguarding issues. There have been no safeguarding issues recently, but the designated safeguarding officer has investigated potential issues appropriately and recorded them in detail. Health and safety procedures are very robust;

the health and safety officer has risk assessed all premises thoroughly. All learners have a good understanding of safeguarding and staff provide them with useful contact details of various support agencies.

Record of Main Findings (RMF)

Westward Pathfinder

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	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
Outcomes for learners	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
The effectiveness of leadership and management	2	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-

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

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	19+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	608							
Principal/CEO	Mr George Curry							
Date of previous inspection	February 2014							
Website address	http://www.path-finder.org.uk/							
Provider information at the time of the inspection								
Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 and above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	-	5	-	30	-	4	-	-
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	1	-	-	1	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14-16								
Full-time	-							
Part-time	-							
Number of community learners	-							
Number of employability learners	-							
Funding received from	Skills Funding Agency (SFA)							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ learndirect ■ Careers South West ■ Petroc ■ SERCO ■ Prospects Services 							

Contextual information

Westward Pathfinder is an independent charitable trust serving young people and adults in Devon. It was established in 1994 as North Devon Pathfinder Trust (NDPT), changing its name to Westward Pathfinder following its purchase of Westward Training and Personnel Ltd (WTP) during 2010. Westward Pathfinder offers classroom-based courses in ICT and employability and workplace learning in health and social care, administration and customer service at centres in Barnstable, Bideford, Exeter and Torquay. Westward Pathfinder also offers learndirect programmes and programmes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions and the European Social Fund that are not in scope of this inspection. The county of Devon is predominantly rural; most of its urban areas are in the south of the county. Its economy is based largely on tourism, hospitality and care. Work is often seasonal and unemployment levels are higher in coastal areas of the county, particularly during winter months. Devon has one of the lowest minority ethnic population rates in the country.

Information about this inspection

Lead inspector

Charles Clark HMI

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and two additional inspectors, assisted by the Operations and Performance Manager as nominee, carried out the inspection with short notice. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors also used data on learners' achievements over the last three years to help them make judgements. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of learners and employers; these views are reflected throughout the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all 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:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012

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