

# EQL Solutions Limited

## Independent learning provider

<b>Inspection dates</b>		29 June–3 July 2015
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>This inspection:</b>	<b>Requires improvement-3</b>
	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:

- initial assessment results are insufficiently used to determine apprentices' and learners' starting points consequently learning is not systematically planned to meet each individual's needs and target-setting is weak
- a minority of managers and assessors do not adequately monitor or manage the progress that apprentices are making towards the completion of their qualification; this leads to too many apprentices making slow progress and not completing their qualifications by the planned end date
- too few apprentices are challenged to improve their skills in English and mathematics above what is required by their apprenticeship programme
- too many apprentices receive insufficiently detailed written feedback which prevents them reflecting on their achievements and on ways to improve their work further
- managers are not using data effectively to identify and eliminate achievement gaps between different groups of learners
- improvement action plans for staff, following the observation of teaching, learning and assessment, lack clarity and do not focus on strategies for improving the quality of provision.

### This provider has the following strengths:

- apprentices in engineering acquire very good work-related skills that are well planned and meet the individual needs of apprentices, preparing them effectively for a career in the railway industry
- employability learners develop a very good range of personal qualities and employability skills resulting in the majority of learners progressing to an apprenticeship or sustainable employment
- appropriately developed online resources ensure that learners are aware of the importance of well-being and safeguarding
- good partnership arrangements with regional, national and international companies meet their corporate needs successfully for trained and qualified staff while providing employment for local communities.

## Full report

### What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that the results of initial assessment are used fully to determine each learner's starting point and that learning is planned thoroughly to meet each individual learner's needs. Accurately record short- and medium-term targets within individual learning plans so that apprentices fully understand what they have to complete and the timescales for doing so.
- Ensure managers, assessors and tutors accurately monitor apprentices' progress by using an effective tracking system. Quickly identify apprentices who are not making the required progress and rapidly improve the proportion of those who complete their qualifications by the planned end dates.
- Accurately identify at the start of the programmes, through initial and diagnostic assessments, apprentices' and learners' standards in English and mathematics and provide the necessary support to make sure they are stretched and challenged to attain as high a standard as possible in these subjects.
- Provide high-quality, comprehensive written feedback to enable apprentices and learners to reflect on what they have achieved and how they can improve their work further.
- Make much better use of data for analysing achievement gaps between different groups of learners and ensure that the gaps are eliminated as quickly as possible.
- Ensure that the action plans produced for staff following observations of teaching, learning and assessment contain challenging, but realistic, targets that focus on improving the quality of provision, and rigorously and regularly monitor progress against the actions.

### Inspection judgements

Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ EQL Solutions Limited (EQL) provides apprenticeships and adult learning programmes throughout England. Apprenticeships make up more than three quarters of the provision with the majority of programmes delivered in health and social care, and administration. The vast majority of classroom-based employability skills programmes incorporate a range of courses at level 1 aimed at improving learners' skills to achieve sustainable employment. The vast majority of apprentices and learners are adults with many apprentices already securing employment prior to enrolling on the apprenticeship programme. Subcontractors deliver just over half of the apprenticeship and classroom-based provision on behalf of EQL.</li> <li>▪ Achievements on apprenticeship programmes require improvement. The proportion of apprentices who achieve their qualifications within the agreed timescales is too low, leading to almost half of the current apprentices not achieving within their planned timescales.</li> <li>▪ There are too many achievement gaps between different groups of apprentices. At intermediate level, less than half successfully complete the programme on time whereas slightly more advanced-level apprentices achieve by their planned end date. For adult apprentices, only half achieve within planned timescales compared to their 16–18-year-old peers whose achievements are slightly better.</li> <li>▪ Learners' achievements in classroom-based provision are very good and above the high national rates. In the current year, predicted success rates are very high with almost all achieving their qualifications.</li> <li>▪ Insufficient attention is given to the development of higher-level skills in English and mathematics relevant to the workplace. Most apprentices, prior to enrolment, already have the</li> </ul>	

required level of skills for the English and mathematical elements of their apprenticeship, yet only a small minority of learners complete higher-level qualifications in these subjects.

- The centralised monitoring system to coordinate and inform management decisions on the performance of all apprentices, including those in subcontracted provision, is not robust enough. The lack of accurate and concise data prevents managers from evaluating the progress of all learners at EQL and their many subcontractors.
- The promotion and development of personal, social and employability skills are good. Apprentices and learners develop a wide range of skills which they use particularly effectively at work and in their personal lives. These include increased self-confidence, improved self-esteem and efficient time management. Apprentices on management programmes at level 5 develop good work-related skills, such as coaching, providing constructive feedback on their employees' performance in the workplace and delivering difficult messages in relation to underperformance. Learners on the employability programme comment favourably about their developing confidence, improved interpersonal relationships and positive attitudes towards attending the course.
- Managers' collection and analysis of destination data for apprentices require improvement. While a high proportion of apprentices have moved into sustainable employment, data are not systematically collected and analysed to show clearly the destinations of all apprentices. There is an over-reliance on anecdotal case studies and, as a result, managers do not have an accurate overview of the full impact that apprenticeships have on apprentices' future lives.
- The collection and analysis of classroom-based destination data are good. The majority of learners completing this programme progress into sustainable employment or to an apprenticeship at EQL to develop their knowledge and skills further.

### **The quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

Requires improvement

- Teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, reflecting the slow progress the large majority of current apprentices are making.
- The planning and delivery of teaching and learning for a significant majority of apprentices and learners require improvement. Insufficient account is taken of apprentices' and learners' prior knowledge or experience when they start programmes to ensure that they are sufficiently challenged and that their needs are met. Although provision for recording the results of initial assessments and vocational skills scans are made in individual learning plans, these results are not always completed and, as a result, gaps in vocational knowledge and skills are not identified.
- Many assessors do not use target-setting appropriately to ensure that apprentices make good progress in their learning and achieve their full potential. Too few targets focus on the development of knowledge and skills to enable apprentices to gain a broader understanding of the industry in which they work.
- Too often sessions concentrate on assessment and qualification outcomes rather than extending the knowledge, skills and understanding of the apprentices in their work setting. However, engineering apprentices take part in well-planned theory and practical lessons, which extend their knowledge and develop their skills in aspects such as the cutting of rail track.
- Apprentices and learners on pre-employment programmes complete initial and diagnostic assessments in English and mathematics at the start of their programme. However, more than three quarters of apprentices at the time of the inspection had been assessed as being at the required level for English and mathematics. Too few apprentices take higher-level qualifications to develop these skills further.
- Employability learners, many of whom have not been engaged in learning recently, take part in a range of lively activities, which engage and motivate them. The majority of learners progress to an apprenticeship or sustainable employment. However, too much reliance is frequently

placed on the completion of workbooks, which does not meet the individual needs of all learners.

- Tutors make good use of technology to support learners and apprentices to develop their understanding of mathematical theory. For example, in one online session effective use of remote software was used effectively to share the computer screen of the tutor to explain the methodology of converting units of measurement.
- Assessors in the workplace do not always take the opportunity to develop apprentices' skills further or contextualise learning in English and mathematics to help them to relate concepts to the activities they carry out at work.
- Insufficient attention is given to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Assessors and tutors do not routinely identify or correct spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors that learners and apprentices make. Too many documents given to apprentices and learners by assessors and tutors contain spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
- Apprentices and learners receive prompt and supportive oral feedback. However, too many apprentices receive insufficiently detailed written feedback to help them identify what they have done accurately and what they need to do to improve the standard of their work.
- Information, advice and guidance require improvement. Too little account is taken of learners' and apprentices' career aspirations when identifying employment pathways. Records of discussions with apprentices during and at the end of their programme do not identify sufficiently the opportunities available for apprentices to progress in work or take part in further study.
- The promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity is good. The vast majority of learners and apprentices have a good understanding of equality and diversity. Many apprentices work with a diverse range of colleagues and clients and are confident in the way in which they communicate with them and meet their needs. Learners on a pre-employment course took part in a lively discussion about discrimination and racism after watching a short video clip. As a result, their understanding of legislation and the impact of racism in society increased considerably.
- Online resources are good and used appropriately to enhance understanding of well-being and safeguarding. Links to a wide and relevant range of external support agencies provide information on topics such as staying safe at festivals, and the risks associated with terrorism radicalisation and extremism.

## Health and social care

### Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

#### Teaching, learning and assessment in health and social care require improvement because:

- too few health and social care apprentices complete their qualifications within the agreed timescales
- too many apprentices are not set appropriate short- and medium-term targets to challenge them to achieve more; individual learning plans are not regularly updated which results in apprentices being unsure of the progress they are making towards their qualification
- progress reviews of apprentices' performance insufficiently focus on skills development; too much focus is placed on completion of tasks for assessment as opposed to further developing vocational skills and knowledge to enhance their careers
- initial assessment is inconsistent and not always timely; this leads to some apprentices starting their apprenticeship without having appropriate support at the beginning of the programme especially in English and mathematics

- written feedback is insufficiently developmental to allow apprentices to understand what they have completed successfully and what they need to do to gain higher-level knowledge; this leads to apprentices not being able to reflect on the knowledge and skills they have acquired and how improvements can be made in the future.

**In health and social care the provider has the following strengths:**

- many apprentices have a good understanding of safeguarding in relation to the vulnerable adults in their care; for example, one learner was able to describe how they ensure vulnerable adults stay safe when in residential accommodation or on social visits
- equality and diversity are good; apprentices describe how they apply their knowledge to their work with vulnerable adults, for example ensuring the individual needs of service users, who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are met when planning social and personal outings
- assessors provide good pastoral support for apprentices and this contributes to their development of knowledge and the acquisition of skills in health and social care; employers say apprentices develop confidence, self-esteem and social skills during their apprenticeship and most learners enjoy their studies.

**Transportation operations and maintenance**

**Apprenticeships**

Good

**Teaching, learning and assessment in engineering are good because:**

- the majority of apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeship programme in the agreed time period, and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding that will enable them to obtain employment in the rail track industry
- apprentices make good progress and develop very good practical skills and knowledge; in one session all learners used specialist tools to cut sections of rail track to high industrial standards and in a very safe manner
- safety standards, that are learned and maintained during the training, are outstanding and enable the learners to match the very high standards that are required to work in the rail track industry; much time is spent in every practical session undertaking a very thorough safety briefing and apprentices demonstrate a very good awareness of safety, clearly following industrial-standard safety procedures
- apprentices benefit from well-planned training with a good variety of activities that are adapted to suit individual needs and requirements; tutors are particularly skilled at ensuring that all of the learners are fully engaged and benefiting from the session
- tutors use questions very effectively; in one session on manual handling the tutor asked each apprentice pertinent questions which probed their knowledge and made them think carefully before answering while, in another session, learners were required to identify poor lifting techniques that could potentially result in damage to the spine
- the programme has incorporated additional training that is not included in the apprenticeship programme requirements and which has enabled learners to obtain the certification required to work in the rail industry; specific tasks such as 'look out duties' and obtaining the Personal Track Safety card that is mandatory for working in the industry make the apprentices more employable
- apprentices are motivated and committed to developing their knowledge and skills of the industry; they speak highly of the training they receive and experiences they have acquired on their programme

- apprentices have access to very good resources at the Heritage Rail sites that enable them to work in a live environment, thus developing their safety awareness and knowledge while working on real rail tasks; in one session learners were cutting sections of rail while scheduled rail services were operating on an adjacent line
- staff have very good rail experience and knowledge which helps to develop high levels of mutual respect with apprentices and fosters learners' self-confidence; learners readily ask their tutors about their experiences in the industry and this is willingly shared with them.

### **Teaching, learning and assessment in Engineering are not yet outstanding because:**

- on-the-job training is insufficiently monitored and lacks detailed identification of the training and experiences that the apprentices have in this period of their apprenticeship
- the support for enabling apprentices to improve their English skills is insufficient; tutors fail to identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors and support them to improve, for example the misspelling of 'cylinder' or 'hydraulic', in apprentices' written work
- written feedback to apprentices is inconsistent and in some cases lacks detail to help them improve their work and reach their full potential; apprentices do not always get written feedback on what they need to do to improve their knowledge and understanding.

### **Employability skills**

#### **Employability**

Requires improvement

### **Teaching, learning and assessment in employability training require improvement because:**

- the qualifications offered, which are achieved by most learners, are not sufficiently challenging or appropriate for all; a few learners are not sufficiently challenged due to the level of course being too low compared to their prior attainment or experience
- tutors do not carry out initial assessment consistently to establish learners' starting points; they do not always assess or record effectively learners' prior achievements, experiences and future career aspirations
- tutors do not ensure that learning sessions meet the needs of all learners and learning materials are not always at the correct level or relevant; the support needs of learners, such as those with a visual impairment, are not consistently met
- assessment of learning relies too much on written work and tutors do not use other types of assessment evidence, such as observations, sufficiently; tutors do not monitor learners' work closely enough in sessions
- tutors do not promote sufficiently high standards in learners' written work; they do not identify spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors or support them to improve, nor do they ensure that curricula vitae (CVs) produced by learners are of a sufficiently high standard of presentation to impress prospective employers.

### **In employability training the provider has the following strengths:**

- tutors ensure that learning sessions are lively, varied and fun; they quickly engage and motivate learners, many of whom are initially reluctant or lack confidence to participate in group work after long periods of unemployment
- learners develop a good range of employability skills and personal qualities including increased confidence, improved self-awareness and enhanced interview skills; learners refresh and update the skills they have not used for some time and value the opportunity to have these skills



accredited, with the result that the majority of learners progress to an apprenticeship or sustainable employment

- learners develop their skills in using computers for research and to use online learning materials to assess and develop their skills in English and mathematics; some learners have never used a computer before joining the programme and are rightly proud of their achievements
- tutors provide very constructive oral and written feedback to learners every day on the content of their work and their efforts, which they find particularly motivating
- good preparation of learners by tutors, including subcontractors' staff, enables them to apply for specific vacancies within large companies; tutors use their good knowledge of employers' job application and selection processes to prepare learners thoroughly.

## Administration and business management

### Apprenticeships

Requires improvement

### Teaching, learning and assessment in administration and business management require improvement because:

- too few administration and business management apprentices complete their learning programmes within the planned time; while the majority of apprentices enter the programmes with previous experience or high-level academic qualifications most of the current apprentices are making slow progress
- assessors do not make effective use of information on apprentices' prior attainments and experience when planning teaching and learning; as a result, gaps in apprentices' knowledge are not always filled by assessors through effective theoretical sessions
- tracking of apprentices' progress is ineffective and their personal targets are not specific enough and focus too much on the completion of activities to demonstrate competencies to meet the assessment criteria; apprentices are not clear about how much they have completed and what they still need to do to achieve their qualifications
- assessors' written feedback is not specific or detailed enough to help all apprentices improve the quality of their written work and make good progress; assessors do not always systematically identify errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation in apprentices' written work and support them to improve
- assessors do not sufficiently integrate the development of apprentices' English and mathematical skills within vocational learning; too few apprentices are supported to develop these skills beyond the level required for the apprenticeship programme.

### In administration and business management the provider has the following strengths:

- apprentices develop good work-related skills and become more confident through taking on additional responsibilities in the workplace; many are on permanent contracts and undertake internal secondments to broaden their business knowledge such as being apprenticeship ambassadors who promote the benefits of being an apprentice to local schools within the region, developing effective presentation and communication skills
- assessors use their industrial experience effectively to provide good individual coaching and assessment in the workplace; good use of probing questions stretches and challenges apprentices to develop their understanding of the business sector and they are very self-sufficient and motivated through self-directed learning
- apprentices have a good understanding of equality, diversity and safeguarding. They are able to explain complex terms and ideas in their own words; e-safety is a high priority with a good range of resources used by apprentices to reinforce their knowledge of these subjects including radicalisation and extremism.

**The effectiveness of leadership and management****Requires improvement**

- Monitoring and improving the quality of much of the provision requires further development. Operational management needs to focus further on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices.
- Senior leaders are ambitious and have a clear set of key performance indicators for each role within the business. However, managers' use of data to inform improvement actions and performance monitoring is underdeveloped which contributes to the lack of success in improvement planning.
- Managers have introduced a quality improvement plan with key performance indicators, which are not aspirational enough to improve performance quickly. These indicators have focused too much on business targets and qualification outcomes, with very little priority placed on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Managers at EQL meet regularly with their many subcontractors to review apprentices' progress. However, they do not routinely access information remotely as part of the management of partners. While the processes for managing subcontractors are comprehensive, the implementation requires further development. Too much focus is placed on self-generated partner data with little interrogation to validate judgements and evaluate the progress that apprentices and learners are making.
- Self-assessment requires improvement. The process is detailed and inclusive, incorporating good contributions from staff, apprentices, learners and subcontractors and it evaluates the vast majority of the organisation. However, managers do not identify or analyse weaknesses rigorously in the self-assessment report, such as the poor use of data and information. Consequently, the process has not led to sharply focused improvements by managers. Each manager has a dedicated responsibility to update any ongoing actions on the quality improvement plan and this is updated in a timely manner.
- The management of staff performance is adequate and initiated primarily by data checks of the completion of qualifications by apprentices and learners. Improvement actions for staff following one-to-one meetings, appraisals and observations of teaching, learning and assessment lack clarity and they focus too much on task and learner outcomes, rather than on improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff regularly update their continuous professional-development log and undertake regular training in the form of safeguarding updates and the 'Prevent agenda', along with qualifications in teaching and learning. However, it is too early to evaluate fully the effectiveness and impact of this training on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The majority of assessors have a good level of subject knowledge and relevant professional experience, which they apply effectively in assessment activities to engage the vast majority of apprentices and learners.
- Curriculum development is good and aligned closely with the needs of employers regionally, nationally and internationally. Managers are very responsive to employers' business needs for trained and qualified staff in a range of disciplines throughout their organisations nationally.
- Recent initiatives have included the development of skills in English, mathematics, and information and communication technology as part of the employability work programmes. All learners attending employability programmes have the opportunity to complete applications and attend an interview, often with prestigious employers, as part of the scheme. This often leads to an apprenticeship offer.
- Resources are generally good and used effectively. For example, engineering apprentices develop their practical skills successfully on industry-standard railway infrastructure. Apprentices benefit from employment with high-calibre organisations where employers are fully involved in planning and reviewing the learning process.



- The introduction and adoption of an electronic portfolio has been slow and requires further development to be fully integrated across the provision. This has led to apprentices, assessors and managers not having a wholly accurate understanding of the progress that all apprentices and learners are making on their qualifications.
- Managers and staff promote equality and diversity effectively with apprentices and learners. Most staff participate in equality and diversity training which increases their confidence in exploring relevant topics with learners and apprentices. Accordingly, learners and apprentices become more aware and apply their increased understanding in their work roles and personal lives. However, managers' lack of awareness and insufficient action to reduce the gaps in the performance of different groups of apprentices means that not all apprentices are successful.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. All staff have completed safeguarding training at an appropriate level, including the recently introduced 'Prevent agenda'. Appropriate arrangements are in place to protect learners from bullying and harassment in the workplace, and apprentices are clear about reporting any concerns they may have. Managers and staff assess risk appropriately and ensure the health and safety of apprentices. All subcontractors have attended and value sessions to support their safeguarding and Prevent processes.

## Record of Main Findings (RMF)

### EQL Solutions 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	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3	N/A
Outcomes for learners	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3	N/A
The quality of teaching, learning and assessment	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3	N/A
The effectiveness of leadership and management	3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3	N/A

Subject areas graded for the quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Grade
Health and social care	3
Transportation operations and maintenance	2
Employability training	3
Administration	3
Business management	3

Type of provider	Independent learning provider							
Age range of learners	16+							
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	5,553							
Strategic Development Director	Mr Simon Shaw							
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected							
Website address	www.eqlsolutions.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+
	N/A	144	N/A	2	N/A	14	N/A	7
Number of apprentices by Apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	340	1,029	109	1,094	11	123		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
Number of learners aged 14-16	N/A							
Full-time	N/A							
Part-time	N/A							
Number of community learners	N/A							
Number of employability learners	144							
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"><li>ARC Academy UK Limited</li><li>Aspire Sporting Academy Limited</li><li>Essential Learning Company Limited</li><li>JT Development Training Limited</li><li>Kashmir Youth Project</li><li>Partnership Development Solutions Limited</li><li>The Recalvi Enterprise Limited</li><li>Weston Spencer Training Solutions Limited</li></ul>							

## Contextual information

EQL was established in 2013 following the acquisition of the majority of the business and assets of Elmfield Training. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Caretech Holdings PLC. It operates from its head office in Warrington with peripatetic assessors and tutors located throughout England. EQL delivers employability qualifications at level 1 up to and including higher apprenticeships at level 5. Apprenticeship programmes, which are delivered at employers' premises throughout England, cover wide-ranging subject specialisms, provided in conjunction with subcontracted partners. All employability and apprenticeship programmes are funded by the Skills Funding Agency.

## Information about this inspection

<b>Lead inspector</b>	Paul Cocker HMI
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Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and seven additional inspectors, assisted by the Head 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. They 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](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/handbook-for-the-inspection-of-further-education-and-skills-from-september-2012)

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