

# Options 2 Workplace Learning Ltd

Independent learning provider

**Inspection dates**

24–27 May 2016

**Overall effectiveness****Requires improvement**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement
Apprenticeships	Require improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings

### This is a provider that requires improvement

- Apprenticeship success rates have not improved significantly enough, remain low and are below the national rate. Not enough apprentices complete their training programme on time.
- Quality improvement planning and self-assessment lack clear judgements in key areas and staff do not use them effectively as tools for improvement.
- Assessors do not set precise and challenging enough targets for apprentices. Apprentices are not being sufficiently challenged on advanced and higher apprenticeships. On-programme guidance for apprentices requires further development.
- Management information does not provide leaders and managers with accurate and timely programme performance data. Data is not used effectively for improving quality.
- Not enough attention is given to developing apprentices' English and mathematics skills. English and mathematics are insufficiently linked to vocational training.
- Apprentices' understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and British values is not sufficiently developed and assessors do not test apprentices' knowledge of these issues sufficiently.

### The provider has the following strengths

- Highly effective networking activity with partners meets local, regional and national needs well. Employers value the recruitment and training packages on offer highly.
- Very effective arrangements are in place to select and monitor subcontractors and the subcontractor network is used well to share good practice.
- English and mathematics qualification achievements at level one are high. First-time pass rates are also high.
- Apprentices benefit from very good individual coaching and support in practical sessions and in the workplace. Apprentices develop good technical skills.
- The majority of apprentices continue in sustained employment after their training programme and a significant number are promoted to positions of responsibility.

# Full report

## Information about the provider

- At the time of the previous inspection e-Response had recently taken over Options 2 Workplace Learning Limited (Options 2). e-Response is a national recruitment company based in the West Midlands and Options 2 is one of its wholly-owned subsidiaries. Options 2 has a head office in Northampton. The majority of training programmes are provided in the East and West Midlands. The organisation provides national training programmes for some of its larger employer partners.
- Currently 546 apprentices are following a range of apprenticeship programmes. The two largest areas are business administration and management and transportation, with smaller programmes in health and social care, education and training, leisure, travel and tourism, warehousing, hairdressing and information communications technology (ICT). e-Response works with five subcontractors and has a partnership arrangement with a national bus company.

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

- Raise success rates by collecting and interrogating performance and progression data to monitor progress and identify the interventions necessary to improve the apprenticeship programme.
- Assessors need to set more challenging and detailed targets for apprentices at progress review meetings, record off-the-job training activity better and provide more systematic and focused on-programme careers guidance.
- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by using detailed information on apprentices' existing skills and abilities, monitor their progress rigorously and set clear targets for improvement.
- Ensure that the quality improvement plan (QIP) and the self-assessment report become regularly monitored tools for improvement. Ensure that all staff know how they can contribute to it to drive progress.
- Improve the teaching and promotion of English and mathematics so that all apprentices develop the skills at the level they need to fulfil their career aspirations. Ensure that observations of teaching, learning and assessment focus sufficiently on the progress made by individual apprentices.
- Ensure that feedback on marked work enables apprentices to know exactly what they need to do to improve their vocational work and their use of accurate English and mathematics.
- Help apprentices understand the 'Prevent' duty, British values and equality and diversity better by considering the issues during training and progress reviews.

# Inspection judgements

## Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- Managers have clearly identified the weaknesses that caused a decline in apprentices' achievements. They have started to implement appropriate actions to reverse this trend and have successfully eradicated much poor practice. However, teaching, learning and assessment and personal development, behaviour and welfare, and in particular the integration of English and mathematics within vocational training, require improvement. Leaders' and managers' actions to raise standards are not yet fully effective.
- The management information system is not well managed. It does not provide the range of information required or provide timely and accurate data on which leaders and managers can base decisions. The current system is not being utilised to its full potential, though this partially reflects that three systems have been combined recently. Staff training and development has been identified to address the situation but has not yet been implemented.
- The self-assessment report, while critical, is too descriptive and does not fully inform the development of the quality improvement plan. The current quality improvement plan (QIP) is comprehensive and captures the majority of key development points but it is unwieldy, which hinders its use as a working document. Staff do not recognise the QIP as a key tool for improvement.
- Leaders and managers have prioritised the observation of teaching, learning and assessment. Observations are regular and well recorded, but lack focus on ensuring that apprentices are making good progress during sessions. Performance of staff at all levels is well managed through regular one-to-one development meetings, though targets set for assessors do not contain sufficient detail.
- Leaders and managers are enthusiastic and have created a culture of continuous improvement. They are working well with staff to develop and provide a better service to both employers and apprentices. Recent changes at senior level have led to a clear focus on the quality of training, assessment and staff to ensure that apprentices complete their programmes on time.
- Robust monitoring arrangements ensure that each subcontracting partner meets their well-defined contractual obligations and provides a good quality learning experience for apprentices. Leaders and managers frequently monitor the performance of subcontractors. They have created a well-managed network of subcontractors and this is used effectively to share good practice.
- Good practice and quality improvement activities are in place to support teaching and learning, the development of management information and governance. These activities have started to influence and improve the quality of provision. Assessor standardisation meetings are held regularly and challenge assessors through a range of development activities to improve their practice. Quality of the training provision is a key agenda item at monthly management meetings and actions are now being monitored and used well to improve the quality of programme delivery.
- The organisation has a clear focus on equality and diversity issues. However, this is not sufficiently emphasised and reinforced to apprentices at progress reviews. They actively encourage the participation of under-represented groups through initiatives, which include a scheme to encourage females into the driving of large goods vehicles. Apprentices are respectful towards each other and their colleagues. They feel safe in their working environment and work well together.
- **The governance of the provider**
  - Directors and leaders have not used management information well. Performance data has not been seen as a key source of information to gauge organisational performance and manage the performance of managers and assessors.
  - Directors have a clear direction for the growth of the organisation and have recruited a very experienced team of training and development professionals to support this. Strategies to support employers through the training levy and the new trailblazer apprenticeship programmes are in place and a traineeship programme is under development.
  - Directors and leaders work well with local, regional and national partners to support local and national government priorities. Partners include several large national employers, local enterprise partnerships and local authority business groups. As part of a recruitment organisation, Options 2 provide recruitment and training packages that employers value highly. These packages meet a range of their business needs at a variety of levels.
- **The arrangements for safeguarding are effective**
  - Leaders and managers take their safeguarding responsibilities very seriously and ensure that staff are well aware of the contributions they need to make to ensure that apprentices remain safe. Detailed

safeguarding and health and safety policies and procedures are in place. Two well-qualified safeguarding officers and a deputy are in place for apprentices and staff to contact and liaise with. Good links are established with the local authority safeguarding board.

- A recent, particularly well-handled and -recorded safeguarding issue was identified by inspectors. A clear trail of evidence and compliance with the organisation's safeguarding policy was in evidence. The relevant authorities were notified and involved and the issue resolved to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.
- Leaders and managers ensure that trained members of staff carry out detailed health and safety and safeguarding risk assessments on all employers, their premises and the premises of subcontractors. Assessors regularly monitor employers' health and safety arrangements through apprentice progress reviews.
- All staff have received formal 'Prevent' duty and British values training. Safeguarding training has also been completed by all staff and regular certification refreshers are carried out with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Since the previous inspection, apprentices have become very aware of the e-safety and cyber bullying agenda, which is well covered at induction and regularly discussed at progress reviews. However, apprentices' understanding and recall of how to remain safe with regard to radicalisation and extremism is limited.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment** requires improvement

- Too few assessors focus sufficiently on developing apprentices' English and mathematics skills beyond the level required for the apprenticeship programme. They do not challenge apprentices to develop skills beyond their starting points. Assessors do not integrate English and mathematics skills well enough in vocational sessions. As a result, too few apprentices are sufficiently clear about how they can apply these skills in their work and personal lives. However, apprentices on passenger carrying vehicles programmes (PCV) apply mathematics well at work.
- Assessors do not set precise enough targets with apprentices to enable them to make quick enough progress with their learning. Too often written feedback on apprentices' assessed work does not provide sufficient detail to help them make rapid progress or improve the quality of their work. Assessors' feedback does not address apprentices' grammatical mistakes or provide them with strategies to identify and correct these errors themselves.
- Staff do not record off-the-job training well enough. Although the organisation meets the requirements for apprenticeships, managers and assessors are not clear enough about the amount of time required for each component of training and do not ensure that apprentices accurately record time spent on activities.
- Most apprentices work well during practical sessions and enjoy their learning. Assessors are appropriately qualified and have good vocationally relevant experience which they use skilfully to deepen apprentices' knowledge and understanding. Assessors use an appropriate range of assessment methods and resources effectively, including technology, to involve their apprentices. As a result, apprentices are well motivated and develop their levels of ability, confidence and practical skills. The majority of current apprentices are making at least the progress expected of them.
- Leaders and managers work closely with a wide range of local and national employers to ensure that they provide the most suitable opportunities for apprentices and that most on- and off-the-job training is well coordinated. Subcontractors provide apprentices with good experiences, which are closely monitored through rigorous subcontracting arrangements.
- Most apprentices make good progress in the development of technical skills through their workplace training and make a valuable contribution to their employers' business. For example, management apprentices develop effective people management skills that their employers value highly. Hairdressing apprentices confidently cut and colour clients' hair, meeting industry standards well. Apprentices feel safe in their working environments and they know how to work safely.
- Apprentices benefit from good individual coaching and support in practical sessions and in the workplace, enabling them to apply their learning competently at work. Equality and diversity are regularly promoted through coaching and practical sessions. However, discussions in progress reviews on these topics are not covered sufficiently. Overall, the quality of learning and standards of apprentices' work are good but in a minority of cases the more able apprentices are not set work that is difficult enough to enable them to make appropriate progress.
- Support for apprentices is good. Initial assessment is effective in ensuring that additional support needs are identified and provided where required. While most apprentices receive useful advice and guidance that ensures that they are enrolled on suitable programmes, too many apprentices are unclear about their future career options.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare** requires improvement

- The development of apprentices' understanding of life in modern Britain is underdeveloped. Assessors do not routinely use apprentices' social and work experiences to encourage discussion, or to extend their understanding during progress reviews. Where promotion of this is effective, assessors hold interesting discussions with apprentices and passionately discuss topics relating to topical news stories such as the referendum on Britain staying in the European Union.
- Most apprentices do not understand the dangers of radicalisation and extremism or how this is relevant to their own situation. Assessors do not routinely introduce these topics effectively during training sessions or progress reviews, except for apprentices completing passenger-carrying vehicle (PCV), where apprentices have good awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Most apprentices receive clear and impartial advice and guidance when they are recruited to apprenticeships, enabling them to make appropriate decisions about their training options. However, too few apprentices access careers guidance to help them make informed choices about further learning or employment while on their training programmes. Apprentices are enthusiastic and most are encouraged to progress to the next level. Apprentices continue in their employment but there is no systematic tracking of their progress and clear progression routes are not identified.
- Assessors' expectations for apprentices on higher-level programmes are too low and do not take account of whether the apprentice is capable of more. Learning activities are not sufficiently challenging to enable the apprentices to achieve a high standard consistent with their ability, their future goals for study and ultimate career aspirations.
- Apprentices develop good employability and vocational skills that match industry standards well, including particularly good technical knowledge, which they use effectively in the workplace. This often leads to improved job roles and responsibilities. Examples include apprentices dealing with payroll and being promoted to supervisory and first-line management positions. Provision of employability skills are good.
- Some apprentices gain useful and highly relevant additional qualifications and skills. Examples include apprentices on industrial and warehousing apprenticeships gaining forklift truck driving licences to support their employment options. Retention of apprentices in permanent jobs after their training is high. Promotion of apprentices takes place to posts such as senior care assistants and warehouse supervisors.
- Apprentices' behaviour is good. They are positive about their learning and are respectful to their peers and colleagues. Apprentices are punctual at work and enjoy their learning, are confident, communicate well and develop good independent study and research skills. PCV apprentices are very confident in their work with passengers and fulfil their duty of care very professionally.
- Apprentices work safely and have a good understanding of safe working practices. They develop good skills and know how to stay safe at work and from personal harm. Apprentices working in care homes have good awareness of how to protect themselves and others from personal harm caused by patients with dementia who are in crisis.

## **Outcomes for learners** require improvement

- The overall success rate and the number of apprentices achieving their qualification within their planned time has improved since the previous inspection, but still remains low and below national rates. Most current apprentices are making expected progress from their starting points and the majority are on target to complete within their planned time.
- The proportion of apprentices who progress to the next level of apprenticeship is low. This reflects the majority of job roles not allowing opportunities for apprentices to meet the advanced or higher-level criteria of the qualifications. The large majority of apprentices acquire good work skills and progress to sustained employment on completion of their programmes.
- Leaders and managers analyse performance of different groups of apprentices thoroughly and on a regular basis. All groups are currently progressing at a similar rate and no discernible gaps in achievement exist.
- Apprentices perform well in English and mathematics, with the large majority passing their functional skills test first time. English and mathematics are being well received by apprentices, and level one pass rates overall are high. Apprentices gain their functional skills early in their programme. Delivery of functional skills as stand-alone qualifications results in a lack of integration of these into the workplace.

## Provider details

<b>Type of provider</b>	Independent learning provider
<b>Age range of learners</b>	16+
<b>Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year</b>	995
<b>CEO</b>	Paul Alekna
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.options2.net">www.options2.net</a>

## 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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+		
	34	350	5	115	N/A	42		
	16-19		19+		Total			
	N/A		N/A		N/A			
	N/A							
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)								
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age								
Number of traineeships								
Number of learners aged 14–16								
Funding received from								
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:								

## Information about this inspection

### Inspection team

Tim Hanson, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Karen Tucker	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the director of funding and contracts, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of students and employers; these views are reflected within the report. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

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