

Lifeskills Solutions Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates	20–23 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for learners	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Apprenticeships	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- The large majority of learners achieve their qualifications, and trainees progress well to further study, apprenticeships or work.
- A high proportion of study programme learners achieve their functional skills qualifications at the first attempt.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use well to help learners and apprentices develop good practical skills to industry standard.
- Staff provide good pastoral and educational support for learners to overcome personal difficulties that may become barriers to learning.
- Learners receive good impartial advice and guidance about the options available to them.
- Apprentices develop good work-related skills, which are valued by employers.
- Senior leaders and managers extend the aspirations, progression opportunities and employability of trainees, learners and apprentices.
- Senior leaders, managers and staff work closely with local and regional employers, partners and learners to ensure that learning programmes meet employers' business priorities and the expectations of learners.

It is not yet an outstanding provider

- Teachers do not challenge the most able learners on study programmes, which prevents them from reaching their full potential.
- Records of observations of teaching, learning and assessment and subsequent action plans require improvement to ensure that teachers make rapid progress to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Not all learners on study programmes access work experience or realistic work-related learning, and teachers do not ensure that work experience supports the development of learners' skills sufficiently.
- Senior leaders and managers do not analyse data at headline level sufficiently well to identify trends and patterns to inform their improvement actions.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Lifeskills Solutions (LS) is a national independent learning provider with a head office in Rotherham and five training centres around the country in Leeds, Sheffield, Lowestoft, Basildon and Rotherham. LS provides apprenticeships, study programmes and traineeships for 16- to 18-year olds. Many learners on study programmes have low prior attainment, especially in English and mathematics, and have complex personal and social needs. Courses are offered in customer service, construction, motor vehicle, beauty and childcare, and apprenticeships in customer service, warehousing and distribution, and business administration.
- Around 705 learners and/or apprentices are enrolled on programmes each year. At the time of the inspection, approximately 210 enrolments were apprentices, seven learners were on traineeships and five learners were on adult learning programmes, with a further 120 learners aged 16 to 18 on study programmes.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment further by:
 - ensuring that managers who observe teaching and learning increase their focus on the progress learners are making, especially the progress of the most able
 - ensuring that teachers' action plans, following their observations, are detailed and specific about what improvements are needed and by when
 - ensuring that teachers and assessors provide learners and apprentices with more detailed feedback on the quality of learners' work, so that learners are clear about how to improve both their English skills and overall performance
 - ensuring that the most able learners are given work that they find stimulating and challenging so that they are able to make rapid progress and achieve to their full potential.
- Improve the effectiveness of study programmes by:
 - ensuring that all study programme learners have access to good-quality work placements or realistic work projects
 - ensuring that teachers accurately identify which personal, social and employment skills learners need to develop while on work placement, monitor the achievement of these skills and make adjustments as required.
- Improve the monitoring of performance by analysing data in more depth so that trends in quality and performance across the organisation can be more easily identified.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- Senior leaders and managers have very high ambitions for learners and are dedicated to providing the best life chances they can to help the most disadvantaged learners obtain qualifications and make progress either into employment or onto further learning programmes. Leaders focus well on the personal development of learners and ensure that learners receive specialist advice and guidance to enable them to achieve their learning goals. For example, when necessary, learners are referred to bereavement counsellors and drug and alcohol misuse advisers, and homeless learners are referred to housing associations to help them obtain accommodation.
- Senior leaders and managers invest heavily in placing learners' sense of well-being at the forefront of the provision and regularly reward learners for their hard work. For example, every month, learners who make good progress receive rewards, financial and otherwise, including tablet computers, to help build their sense of belonging, self-esteem, self-worth and belief in themselves. Leaders respond well to learners' and employers' views and have improved the provider's resources and facilities as a result.
- Leaders and managers place a high priority on the development of learners' English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills and have ensured that all staff achieve qualifications in English and mathematics and, when appropriate, ICT at level 3. Leaders and managers place an emphasis on the development of learners' speaking and listening skills, the correction of apprentices' written English work and the development of their English skills beyond the achievement of functional skills. Senior leaders have invested heavily in this area but recognise there is more work to do on the development of GCSE English and mathematics courses.
- Senior leaders, managers and staff work closely with local and regional employers, partners and learners to ensure that learning programmes meet employers' business priorities and learners' expectations. Senior leaders are active in the development and planning of programmes to meet the changing needs of local and regional employers in the areas in which LS works. For example, a new sports programme specialising in football starts in August 2016, working with a regional football academy and a local football club. Apprenticeships in health and social care, digital marketing and small animal care are starting in September 2016 to meet the skills shortages in these areas. LS's provision meets six out of the nine local enterprise partnership (LEP) regional development priorities.
- Centre managers and the apprenticeship manager monitor the performance of all learners thoroughly and complete highly detailed weekly reports covering the performance and progress learners are making towards the achievement of targets for attendance, retention and achievement. Senior managers monitor these weekly reports thoroughly and, when appropriate, provide challenge to managers. Assessors have manageable caseloads of apprentices and work in small geographical areas, which ensures that they can monitor apprentices' progress effectively.
- Performance management of staff is thorough; where teachers do not meet the high standards expected, they are supported to improve and if, they do not improve, they leave LS. However, this does not always happen quickly enough to ensure that all learners experience high-quality teaching. Records of observations of teaching, learning, assessment and subsequent actions do not focus sufficiently on the identification of the progress learners are making or whether learners are achieving the standards of which they are capable.
- While leaders and managers monitor and self-assess the quality of provision at course and programme level well, they do not take enough account of overall and trend data to help inform improvement actions. For example, leaders and managers have an insufficient overview of planned and actual work experience and work-related activities for learners on study programmes to ensure that all learners receive their entitlement. In addition, leaders and managers do not monitor sufficiently the planning and recording of the off-the-job training for apprentices.
- Equality and diversity topics are reinforced well in centres through displays of learners' work and posters, which support a culture of respect throughout the organisation. Learners' understanding is developed through induction materials and especially in English reading and writing lessons.
- **The governance of the provider**
 - The managing director and the deputy managing director have a very detailed understanding of the performance of the provision. They support and challenge each other well and together ensure that development and expansion plans are appropriate and for the benefit of learners and employers. An external consultant is used effectively, to provide scrutiny and monitor the progress senior leaders make towards improving performance.

■ The arrangements for safeguarding are effective

- Leaders and managers use effective safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that learners are safe. All staff are suitably trained, and managers take prompt and effective action to resolve any concerns raised, involving external agencies when appropriate.
- Staff take action quickly when extremism and radicalisation concerns are identified and make referrals to external agencies when needed. However, not enough learners have a sufficient understanding of radicalisation or extremism to enable them to identify potential risks.
- Managers make appropriate checks before new staff start, keep records up to date and maintain and review the central register regularly.
- Learners feel safe, work safely in practical areas and know how to report any concerns they may have; they are confident that their concerns will be taken seriously.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The large majority of apprentices make good progress because the large majority of teachers and assessors use information on apprentices' starting points well to plan teaching and assessment. As a result, apprentices extend their learning swiftly and produce good standards of theoretical and practical work.
- Most teachers ensure that the large majority of learners enrolled on study programmes in childcare, hair and beauty and motor vehicle accelerate their understanding of theoretical concepts and principles, improve their understanding of employers' requirements and expectations and develop good practical skills to industry standard. However, too often teachers do not plan demanding teaching and assessment activities for learners studying customer services courses. As a result, too many learners fail to be inspired, produce poor-quality work and make insufficient progress.
- Most teachers ensure that most apprentices have a good grasp of how and why relevant theory underpins their practical skills development. For example, warehousing apprentices use the calculation of different measurements of units of issue to ensure accurate picking, packing and addressing of customers' orders.
- A minority of teachers of study programmes do not plan work to meet the ability levels of the most able learners in the class. As a result, too many of the most able learners find tasks too easy and do not complete work that challenges them to exercise higher-level thinking skills and to make the rapid progress of which they are capable. For example, in English, learners with varying skills levels, including those with an existing high grade at GCSE, all work on foundation-level tasks.
- The majority of teachers and assessors use questioning techniques effectively, to probe learners' and apprentices' understanding and to challenge them to extend their learning. However, not enough teachers on study programmes check learners' understanding thoroughly and, consequently, they are not able to plan appropriate learning that meets learners' needs fully.
- Teachers and assessors promote most apprentices' development of spoken and written English skills successfully. For example, teachers ensure that apprentices use technical language frequently and accurately; as a result, the large majority of apprentices improve their articulation and produce written work of a good standard. The large majority of learners on study programmes improve their spoken English skills well through carefully planned and effective speaking and listening activities. However, teachers do not make sure that all learners develop their written English skills fluently or produce written work that demonstrates a robust understanding of writing style that is free from errors.
- The large majority of teachers and assessors reinforce apprentices' understanding of the importance of mathematics within their relevant industry; consequently, the large majority of apprentices develop their mathematics skills well. Most teachers on study programmes plan effectively, to ensure that their learners augment their numeracy skills well, but not enough teachers challenge learners to develop their ability to apply reasoning and problem solve more complex mathematics fluently.
- Leaders have not ensured that the small minority of learners studying GCSE English and mathematics benefit from sufficient teaching expertise to develop their knowledge and skills thoroughly.
- The large majority of assessors provide flexible times and dates to assess apprentices' competencies in the workplace. This enables apprentices to develop their workplace skills and improves their contribution to the workplace at key points during the production or function of the business. Teachers' use of assessment on study programmes motivates the majority of learners to develop their knowledge and skills. However, a minority of teachers do not use a sufficient range of assessment methods to enable learners to hone their thinking and application, and, as a consequence, a minority of learners do not make good progress.

- The majority of teachers' marking of learners' work is informative and helps the majority of learners to improve their work. A minority of teachers do not mark apprentices' work accurately enough to ensure that they are making good progress, and, consequently, a minority of apprentices do not know what to do, or by when, to improve their work.
- Most teachers and assessors make excellent use of information and learning technology (ILT) to support apprentices' learning and achievement. For example, in business administration, apprentices conduct in-depth research on effective communication theory and use a broad range of software on electronic devices to present their findings.
- Most assessors and teachers plan for, and take advantage of, naturally occurring opportunities to promote apprentices' understanding of the diverse needs of their customers and colleagues skilfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

are good

- Learners' attendance is good overall and the attendance and punctuality of learners with complex emotional and behavioural needs increases during the duration of their programme. Managers and teachers link attendance and punctuality well to the development of learners' employment-related skills and challenge learners appropriately. Attendance for apprentices at off-the-job training is good. Apprentices attend scheduled meetings with their assessors promptly and are well prepared for these meetings.
- Learners develop their personal, social and employability skills well. Learners on study programmes have good access to a wide range of enrichment activities that managers and teachers focus on well to develop learners' health and well-being and their understanding of British values. As a result, the majority of learners display behaviour that reflects their understanding of tolerance of others. They are respectful and articulate the importance of tolerance and of treating others with respect and dignity.
- Apprentices develop high levels of confidence and self-assurance and have a strong focus on achieving their qualifications. Apprentices demonstrate high standards of professional behaviour and work well with their assessor, work colleagues and managers. Apprentices have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the workplace. The large majority of learners on study programmes are very positive about their learning and show pride in their attainments and achievements. However, a small minority of learners on study programmes cause low-level disruption, which affects the learning of others and is not routinely challenged by their teachers.
- Learners receive very good, high-quality, impartial advice and guidance prior to, and during, enrolment. As a result, learners are effectively guided to the right course or programme to suit their needs and to enable them to progress with their studies or to further education, employment or apprenticeships.
- The standards of apprentices' work and the skills they develop meet the needs of their employers well. Learners on study programmes develop good practical skills in motor vehicle, construction and nail art. For example, construction learners were able to lay block paving that was flat and uniformly patterned. In contrast, the majority of learners studying customer services courses do not routinely produce sufficiently high standards of work.
- The majority of learners on study programmes have access to meaningful work-related activity or work experience. However, teachers do not yet monitor how effectively the time spent on these activities enhances learners' skills, and managers do not have a sufficiently robust process to ensure that all learners access work experience at the most appropriate time in order to have the maximum effect on their skills development.
- Learners feel, and are, safe and they know how to raise any concerns they may have. Learners and apprentices have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe at work and during classroom-based practical activities. However, learners do not have a sufficiently deep understanding of the potential risks and threats from radicalisation and extremism.

Outcomes for learners

are good

- The proportion of adult learners and learners aged 16 to 18 who successfully achieve their qualifications has increased steadily since the last inspection and is now good. The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications, and the proportion who achieve in a timely manner is in excess of other providers nationally.
- Current apprentices are making good progress, and classroom-based learners make at least the progress

expected of them and are well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment. Employers and assessors make effective use of additional units of qualifications to extend apprentices' knowledge and understanding. The most able learners on classroom-based learning programmes do not make the progress of which they are capable.

- Managers have been effective in identifying and eradicating the differences in achievement gaps between different groups of learners, including those for care leavers or children looked after. For example, achievement gaps between male and female learners on study programmes were accurately linked to low achievement rates in warehousing and distribution courses, and, through effective support and management, success rates were increased. The proportion of learners in receipt of support who are successful in achieving their qualifications is slightly higher than their peers.
- The proportion of learners who achieve their functional skills English and mathematics qualifications is good and has risen sharply over the last two years. The very large majority of learners pass at the first attempt.
- Most apprentices and the large majority of classroom-based learners develop good vocational skills and knowledge and develop effectively within their job roles. For example, apprentices on sales and customer service programmes develop the skills to manage a range of complex telephone enquiries and sales calls effectively.
- Most apprentices remain in work after completing their qualifications. The very large majority of learners on study programmes progress to further education or work, and the proportion of trainees who progress to work or further study is very good. The large majority of trainee learners progress to apprenticeships at the end of their programme.
- While the percentage of learners who progress to higher levels of English and mathematics during their time with the provider has increased, too few learners on customer service programmes are challenged to progress from short award qualifications to more substantial courses.

Types of provision

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- At the time of the inspection, there were 120 learners on study programmes in seven subject areas. The largest areas are motor vehicle, nail art and customer service, with programmes ranging from entry level to level 2. The number of weeks learners spend on programmes depends on their individual personal, social and educational development needs, with many learners progressing after eight weeks.
- Managers have implemented all aspects of study programme requirements successfully and deliver individualised programmes, which make good use of initial assessment to ensure that learners are placed on the right course at an appropriate level. Information, advice and guidance are good and lead to high numbers remaining on their courses and progressing to positive destinations when they leave.
- The majority of teachers use their considerable industry-specific knowledge and expertise to plan a broad range of tasks and activities that reflect industry practice well. They motivate the majority of learners on study programmes to make good gains in knowledge and skills. For example, learners studying hairdressing and beauty therapy can analyse adeptly the expectations of employers regarding product design, commercial viability and sales techniques. However, a minority of learners do not complete work of a sufficient depth and quality, and are not challenged enough to make good progress.
- Learners who are in need of additional help benefit from targeted support from teachers, which significantly contributes to their progress and success. A large proportion of learners have experience of exclusion from education and chaotic lifestyles. Managers ensure that a good level of support and guidance enables most learners to stay in learning and make at least their expected progress.
- Learners develop work-related skills in the majority of lessons, which are supported well by appropriate work experience for the majority of learners. However, managers have not yet sufficiently planned work experience for all learners in line with their entitlement. Learners benefit from a good range of enrichment and work-related activities, which provide additional learning opportunities and the further development of wider employability skills, such as team working and problem solving. A few learners have developed sufficient confidence to apply for, and take on, part-time jobs in their chosen industry, for example, a care home, and are progressing to a local college to undertake higher-level training alongside their jobs.
- The majority of teachers promote numeracy well in sessions, and, as a result, the majority of learners apply their use of number effectively. In contrast, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to extending learners' higher-level skills to solve more complex mathematics problems. Learners also develop good spoken English skills; however, the assessment of English skills in written work is not rigorous enough in

order to develop learners' written work further.

- The large majority of learners behave well, are courteous and show respect for each other and their teachers; however, in a very small minority of lessons, low-level disruption is unchallenged and hinders learners' progress. Learners demonstrate a sufficiently developed understanding of equality and diversity by valuing each other's contributions. Learners' attendance improves over time and learners are punctual as a result of focused targets.
- Too many learners are not provided with opportunities to extend or further consolidate learning outside of the classroom, and this results in the slow development of independent learning and thinking skills.
- Teachers do not always take sufficient account of individual learning needs when planning for learning. Targets and activities are not challenging enough for the most able learners, and, as a result, a few learners do not make the progress of which they are capable. In a small minority of lessons, teachers do not consistently check all learners' understanding before moving on to the next activity. This means that a few learners are unclear, and this slows their progress.

Apprenticeships

are good

- LS has 212 apprentices. 164 are aged 16 to 18, with the very large majority in either business administration or warehousing and distribution. A very small minority of apprentices are following programmes in retailing, customer service, marketing and sales. Most are intermediate apprentices.
- The large majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications, and most achieve in the planned timescales and progress into full-time employment. Apprentices develop good work-related, personal and social skills. They demonstrate high standards of professionalism and increase their levels of responsibility in their job roles. Apprentices greatly improve their understanding of the work of their employers, contribute well to the businesses and undertake additional projects, for example by inputting a range of complex data to create spreadsheets to help managers with their business planning.
- Assessors are enthusiastic, experienced practitioners with good occupational skills and knowledge. They plan training and assessment well to meet the needs of individual apprentices. Assessors make effective use of apprentices' prior experience and learning to ensure that training challenges them to progress well. For example, assessors plan additional units for apprentices to extend their knowledge and skills beyond the framework requirements.
- Assessors use questioning techniques skilfully to challenge apprentices to develop a good understanding of the concepts behind their practice, for example why effective communication skills are vital to good levels of customer service. Assessors use a good range of learning activities, including discussions, videos and presentations, to capture apprentices' interest and motivation. They use technology particularly effectively in training and assessment. Apprentices use their electronic portfolios well to maintain ongoing communication with their assessors, compile detailed evidence and track their own progress.
- Apprenticeships meet the individual needs of apprentices and employers very well. LS's staff undertake a detailed organisational needs analysis for each employer to identify the correct apprenticeship programme and potential apprentice to meet their business needs. Staff respond to employers' and apprentices' requests very quickly. Assessors and employers collaborate effectively to design their apprentice's training and to match working patterns and workplace activities to ensure that they make good progress. Assessors and managers work well with employers to provide highly effective support for apprentices with additional support needs, which ensures that they stay in training and successfully complete their qualifications. When appropriate, apprentices receive shorter but more frequent assessor visits to help them cope with the demands of the programme.
- Apprentices receive good information, advice and guidance to help ensure that they choose an apprenticeship and an employer that match their career aspirations and abilities. They improve their understanding of progression opportunities from the good, ongoing information, advice and guidance from assessors.
- Apprentices have a high level of health and safety awareness, due to the high emphasis placed on this aspect by assessors and employers. Warehousing learners ensure that they wear the correct personal protective equipment when at work.
- Assessors provide apprentices with good, detailed oral feedback with clear guidance on how they can improve further. This is particularly effective in continuing to develop apprentices' effective use of English, mathematics and ICT skills. However, a minority of assessors fail to provide apprentices with sufficiently detailed written feedback. Although a minority of learners work to higher-level functional skills qualifications than their programme requires, managers do not ensure that apprentices have sufficient opportunity to study English and mathematics beyond functional skills.

- Apprenticeships are planned and managed effectively to meet the principles of apprenticeships. However, managers do not accurately record the amount of off-the-job learning apprentices receive.
- Reviews of apprentices' progress require improvement. A small minority of reviews have not taken place as planned. A minority of employers are not sufficiently involved in the discussions of apprentices' progress and planned actions for the subsequent period.
- Assessors are not always sufficiently skilled at setting targets for apprentices, which, in a minority of cases, are too general for apprentices to use to plan their learning effectively.

Provider details

Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16+
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	700
Principal/CEO	Spencer Fearn
Website address	www.learnaliving.co.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	
	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+	16-18	19+
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	113	5	7	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+		
	150	35	14	13	0	0		
Number of traineeships	16-19		19+		Total			
	7		0		7			
Number of learners aged 14–16	N/A							
Funding received from	Education Funding Agency and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	None							

Information about this inspection

Inspection team

Shane Langthorne, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Matt Vaughan	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mary Aslett	Ofsted Inspector
Stephen Masterson	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Bealey	Ofsted Inspector
Stella Owen	Ofsted Inspector

The above team was assisted by the deputy managing director, 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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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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