

# Economic Solutions Limited Liverpool

National Careers Service

**Inspection dates**

8–11 November 2016

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>		<b>Good</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>	
Quality of information, advice and guidance	<b>Good</b>	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Good</b>	
Outcomes for customers	<b>Good</b>	
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected	

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Experienced advisers demonstrate a good range of skills that are particularly important in helping customers to progress.
- Customers develop positive attitudes and value the support from advisers, which helps them develop good levels of confidence and self-esteem and supports them to make informed decisions about their future.
- Good and wide-ranging partnership arrangements support customers into jobs and learning.
- Advisers recognise and respond well to customers' individual needs and differences, helping them remove barriers to learning and enabling them to progress to learning and jobs.
- Managers oversee the quality of subcontracted provision well.
- Managers very effectively manage a wide range of data to improve outcomes for customers.

## Full report

### Information about the provider

- Economic Solutions Liverpool holds the National Careers Service contract for Liverpool City region, Cumbria and Lancashire. The head office is located in Manchester city centre. The company is a not-for-profit company with a private-sector-led board.
- Economic Solutions Liverpool is the prime contractor and manages seven subcontractors. Advisers meet with in excess of 36,000 customers each year at one of the 36 sites or 65 outreach centres.

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

- Managers should increase customer attendance rates at one-to-one sessions with advisers, particularly in Jobcentre Plus venues, in order to support customers to progress into learning and jobs.
- Ensure that the quality of skills action plans is consistently high and targets are challenging and meaningful, and that quality assurance improves the quality of skills action plans across the provision, including in subcontracted provision.
- Improve planning and time management in one-to-one sessions with advisers to ensure that information, advice and guidance are beneficial in supporting customers to make progress.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders and managers have developed successfully and communicated clearly a culture of high expectations focused on organisational priorities such as jobs and learning outcomes for customers. They have successfully implemented appropriate policies and procedures which have resulted in consistent working practices and high-quality provision.
- Arrangements for the performance management of subcontractors and individual advisers are good. Managers regularly review advisers' performance through a range of indicators such as the quality of interviews with customers, customer satisfaction and progression into learning and jobs. All advisers benefit from a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development that focuses on key areas for improvement, such as skills action plans, interview techniques and the setting of relevant targets for customers.
- Performance management of subcontractors focuses on advisers achieving high-quality provision and their ability to meet agreed performance targets. Managers use information about performance very well and meet regularly with subcontractors to discuss performance and, where necessary, challenge subcontractors as to why performance targets have not been met.
- Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of information, advice and guidance are good. Managers have a detailed and accurate knowledge of the quality of all aspects of information, advice and guidance, including that of subcontractors. Through a rigorous moderation process of subcontractors' performance, managers identify accurately the quality of provision. For example, managers recognise that the quality of skills action plans, including challenging targets, is not good enough. Improvement action plans, implemented where subcontractors' performance is below accepted levels, are challenging and monitored well by managers.
- Leaders and managers successfully work with a wide range of partners in order to work with hard-to-reach customers, for example, local enterprise partnerships, Jobcentre Plus, subcontractors and Build Up, a construction provider that works with unemployed people to develop skills required by the construction industry. Managers are particularly skilful in accessing funding and participating in local and national projects to support customers to progress. For example, they direct customers who have an interest in the construction industry to Build Up to achieve employability skills qualifications and the construction skills certification scheme (CSCS) card.
- Managers analyse local market intelligence and other demographic data well to improve further the effectiveness of the information, advice and guidance that customers receive. Close working relationships between the careers inspiration team and schools have resulted in good information, advice and guidance for young people through a range of activities, including large-scale events and school-based activities.
- Self-assessment is accurate, detailed and self-critical, although in parts too descriptive. The most recent self-assessment report identifies accurately that the quality of skills action plans is not good enough, the proportion of customers failing to attend appointments is too high and a need to improve the progression of male customers as it is below that of females.

- Leaders and managers collect, analyse and use data as a tool for improvement very well. They set challenging targets for subcontractors to ensure that customers benefit from the service. Regular monitoring of data, such as customer satisfaction, career management and the proportion of customers who progress into learning and jobs, ensures that leaders and managers quickly identify underperformance across different groups of customers. For example, they have identified White males and customers who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities as not progressing into jobs or learning at the same rate as other groups. As a result, managers have recently implemented an action plan to address this. However, this has yet to have any impact.

### **The governance of the provider**

- The advisory board members monitor closely the delivery of the National Careers Service contract and regularly report to the Economic Solutions Board. Experienced board members provide effective oversight of the provision, and when required, challenge the performance of senior managers well.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers carry out appropriate recruitment checks on all staff and keep detailed records of staff suitability, which they regularly update. Advisers have completed appropriate training on how to keep customers safe and how to protect them from the threat of radicalisation and extremism.
- Investigations of potential safeguarding incidents are swift, recorded diligently and clearly communicated from subcontractors to the Economic Solutions designated safeguarding officer.

### **Quality of information, advice and guidance**

**Good**

- Advisers assess customers' starting points very effectively. They identify quickly customers' barriers to employment, including health issues, and discuss their impact on employment and training opportunities. Advisers are skilful in helping customers to identify their existing knowledge and the skills they can transfer to other contexts.
- Advisers are appropriately qualified, with good and relevant experience. They are highly committed to supporting and advising customers. Their knowledge of the local labour market is good and they use this knowledge very effectively to signpost customers to appropriate employment vacancies and training opportunities.
- Most advisers structure sessions appropriately and consider customers' needs. They ensure that each customer understands the purpose of the session. Advisers help customers to gain maximum benefit from the sessions. They develop good and productive interpersonal working relationships with customers very quickly.
- Most advisers demonstrate a good range of skills that are particularly important when helping customers. They question customers confidently and listen empathetically to their answers. For example, advisers use their skills of clarifying, summarising and paraphrasing well to help customers to progress.

- Advisers work very effectively with a range of customers, recognising their individual needs and differences. They work successfully to promote equality of opportunity, for example when working with ex-offenders, those with caring responsibilities and non-United Kingdom citizens. This makes a good contribution to helping customers progress to learning and employment.
- Advisers effectively negotiate skills action plans with customers to ensure that these capture the content of discussions and provide a clear record of actions to be taken. While these give a useful summary of the advice they give and the actions agreed, in too many sessions, advisers spend too much time recording information. This detracts from the quality of the session. Too often, targets in skills action plans are insufficiently specific and challenging, and the plans frequently contain typographical, spelling and grammatical errors.
- The majority of advisers are usually quick to identify when higher levels of English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills would give customers a better chance of gaining employment. They recommend further training, often leading to qualifications. However, in a small number of cases, they do not explore sufficiently customers' developmental needs in English, mathematics and ICT.
- In a small number of sessions, advisers do not give sufficient attention to planning the session with the customer. They do not clarify sufficiently what customers want to gain from the session or how the session will be structured. Advisers' time management is weak and sessions often over-run. This results in a rushed end to the session or follow-on appointments starting later than arranged.
- When advice sessions are held in subcontractors' offices, the accommodation is welcoming and professional and provides suitable opportunity for confidentiality. Many sessions in Jobcentre Plus offices are held in large, open-plan, noisy offices that do not offer sufficient privacy. The noise is distracting for customers and not conducive to discussions of a personal or private nature.

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

**Good**

- Advisers develop customers' independence skills well by guiding them to appropriate sources of careers-related information to help them to progress. Advisers direct customers to very useful information, advice and resources to encourage them to think of all possible options for obtaining work or training.
- Advisers' skilful facilitation develops customers' decision-making skills about their future goals well. Customers start to prioritise and meet their goals when they receive the good information and advice provided by advisers. Advisers often build successfully on previous advice and help customers prepare for entering, or re-entering, the workforce.
- Customers develop positive attitudes. Unacceptable language rarely occurs and, when it does, advisers are quick to draw attention to it. In group sessions, customers are confident to join discussions where they can express their opinions, but are also respectful of the values and opinions of other customers.
- Customers, in group sessions, develop good employability skills through the achievement of employability units of accredited qualifications and develop good-quality curricula vitae in order to apply for jobs.

- Customers feel and are kept safe. Advisers state the confidential nature of discussions at the start of each session and discuss exceptions to confidentiality and the reporting mechanisms in place for reporting disclosures made by customers.
- Advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices are usually required to advise customers about producing an up-to-date curriculum vitae. Too many advisers produce the curriculum vitae for the customer rather than empowering the customer to produce it themselves. In these situations, customers do not have the benefit of broader employment-related information, advice and guidance.
- Too many customers do not attend scheduled appointments, particularly in Jobcentre Plus offices, which impedes their development and job-seeking abilities.

## Outcomes for customers

**Good**

- Rigorous management of data ensures that the provider's performance meets most of its targets set by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Almost all customers are satisfied with the service they receive and are able to make informed decisions about training and learning to match their career aims. Although job and learning outcomes for customers are steadily improving, they are slightly below the targets set by the SFA.
- Customers make good progress from their starting points in group sessions and in individual meetings with careers advisers. For example, in individual meetings, customers increase their confidence as they discuss their skills and experience and how these will help them to develop their knowledge and skills in order to progress to learning and jobs. In group sessions, customers improve their employability skills through the successful completion of units of employability skills qualifications.
- Customers achieve relevant qualifications, such as CSCS cards, or basic food hygiene or health and safety certificates, to improve their chances of securing employment.
- Leaders and managers collect and analyse a wide range of data about the performance of different groups of customers. Managers recognise that customers who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and White males do not progress into jobs and learning at the same rate as other groups of customers.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	1236932
Type of provider	National Careers Service
Age range of customers	19+
Approximate number of all customers over the previous full contract year	36,000
Chief executive officer	Mark Hughes
Telephone number	0161 245 4740
Website	<a href="http://www.economic-solutions.co.uk">www.economic-solutions.co.uk</a>

At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Blackburn with Darwen Council Burnley College Career Connect Inspira Preston's College Starting Point Vedas
---	---

## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of adult careers, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and online questionnaires to gather the views of customers and partners; these views are reflected within the report. They observed one-to-one adviser sessions, telephone interviews and group sessions. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Anita Pyrkotsch-Jones, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Shahram Safavi	Her Majesty's Inspector
Jean Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Rob Mottram	Ofsted Inspector
Ken Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Pat Hornsby	Ofsted Inspector



Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Learner View**

Learner View is a website where learners can tell Ofsted what they think about their college or provider. They can also see what other learners think about them too. To find out more go to [www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.learnerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

### **Employer View**

Employer View is a website where employers can tell Ofsted what they think about their employees' college or provider. They can also see what other employers think about them too. To find out more go to [www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.employerview.ofsted.gov.uk).

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk)

This publication is available at [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted).

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2016