

# Futures Advice, Skills and Employment

National Careers Service

**Inspection dates**

10–13 January 2017

## Overall effectiveness

**Good**

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>

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good provider

- Customers make good progress from their starting points and the large majority value the help received in making realistic decisions about their future options.
- Customers exhibit sound improvements in personal skills such as confidence and self-esteem that they can successfully apply to enhance their employability and personal lives.
- Advisers ensure that customers have a good appreciation of how their existing skills and knowledge can support access to the broad range of learning and employment options into which a high proportion of them eventually progress.
- Advisers are skilled at putting customers at their ease; they usually maintain customers' interest and provide them with useful help to overcome what are often significant barriers to participating in further study and/or entering the job market.
- Leaders and managers have established an open and supportive culture that is very effective in supporting subcontractors.
- Advisers work well together as part of a team that places customers' needs at the heart of all improvement and development actions.
- Managers have established good working partnerships with a broad network of organisations to benefit customers.
- Managers rigorously monitor the performance of all subcontractors to help maintain and raise the quality of service experienced by customers.

## **Full report**

### **Information about the provider**

- Futures Advice, Skills and Employment holds the National Careers Service contract for the central eastern region that includes Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Northamptonshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Milton Keynes. The company is a not-for-profit company owned by Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. The head office is located in Nottingham.
- The company is the prime contractor and largely delivers the National Careers Service contract through subcontracting arrangements with 17 other organisations. The remaining 30% is delivered directly by the organisation's own advisers. Overall, advisers meet with in excess of 35,000 customers each year at one of 110 sites including Jobcentre Plus, library and community venues across the region.

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

- Leaders and managers should ensure that
  - the use of session observation for quality assurance purposes fully evaluates the impact of the advisers' actions on meeting the needs of the customer
  - advisers negotiate skills action plans with customers that are sufficiently detailed to reflect their aspirations and support effective progression
  - advisers plan and deliver group sessions so that all customers benefit from participating in activities that broaden their understanding of the available progression opportunities
  - they rigorously monitor the rate of each individual subcontractor's advice session cancellations, to identify patterns and trends that inform strategies to raise attendance.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Leaders and managers have high ambitions for the service and effectively promote a mutually supportive organisational culture that prioritises customers' success. As a result, the National Careers Service in the region has significantly increased the proportion of customers securing employment or learning outcomes. In addition, managers have succeeded in increasing the number of customers with whom the organisation engages, using both individual and group sessions.
- Managers use very productive collaborative working with a wide range of partners to enhance the service that customers receive. Managers have been particularly successful in forging strong strategic and operational links with Jobcentre Plus. This has resulted in the seamless integration of information, advice and guidance with other Jobcentre services to enable the movement of customers to their preferred next step.
- Managers have chosen subcontractors carefully to increase the reach of the service throughout the region and address the requirements of both individuals, and specific customer groups. This has made a valuable contribution to ensuring that customers are able to access help at a time and venue that best meets their needs. Accommodation used for advice sessions is of good quality and offers a safe and welcoming environment.
- Performance management of subcontractors is very rigorous and thorough. Managers take swift action where subcontractors are not achieving the agreed standards. Subcontractors are fully involved in setting realistic and challenging targets that they usually meet. However, managers recognise that they do not monitor subcontractors' cancellation rates in sufficient detail to identify patterns and trends to inform improvement actions.
- Managers make good use of detailed quality assurance arrangements to maintain and improve the quality of information, advice and guidance received by customers. The moderation of judgements to ensure consistency of session observers' assessments is robust. This contributes well to the identification of further actions required to improve professional practice. However, in a small minority of cases, observers do not sufficiently focus on the impact of the advisers' activities on the customer's experience.
- Managers provide good support and training for subcontractor staff as part of their relentless focus on successful continuous improvement. Training on key priorities such as safeguarding, keeping safe online and British values is extensive and has made a good contribution to improving advisers' skills and knowledge. Managers have placed a high priority on developing all advisers so they are well qualified and experienced in delivering information, advice and guidance.
- Managers very effectively share local and regional demographic and market information with subcontractors to enhance the work of their advisers. Managers ensure that they align their priorities to help meet the agreed targets and stated objectives of the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). In the large majority of cases, the service is meeting or exceeding its performance targets and making a positive contribution to meeting wider regional priorities.

- Leaders and managers know their provision well and make very good use of the quality improvement plan to drive up standards for all customers. They consult widely and gather evidence from a broad range of sources to produce a largely accurate and self-critical evaluation of the service's quality. However, in a small number of key areas, the associated report is overly descriptive and focuses on actions taken rather than their impact on improving the customer's experience.
- Leaders and managers have excelled in establishing the 'careers inspiration' agenda within the region. They have effectively harnessed the expertise and knowledge of the LEPs, local authorities, subcontractors, employers and schools in the region to promote employability among school pupils. Managers have ensured that all secondary schools are familiar with the range of information that is available and actively promote its use. For example, teachers have benefited from short industrial placements with major national employers in industries that face skills shortages in sectors such as engineering, oil and gas, hospitality, agriculture and the creative industries.

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

- Board members are very experienced, knowledgeable experts in their field and provide highly effective challenge to hold senior managers to account. They monitor how well the service is meeting local and regional priorities and the contribution that managers make to achieve these goals.
- The board members are committed to evaluating and improving the impact of the service on customers' lives. For example, they have recently taken a more hands-on approach to understanding the quality of the provision by observing advice sessions. Currently, board members do not formally evaluate the performance of themselves or the chief executive officer.

### **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and managers have set the responsibility for safeguarding at an appropriately senior level, both at prime contract holder and subcontractor level. Managers investigate any complaints thoroughly, which reinforces staff and customers' confidence in the company's stated commitment to protect everyone from harm.
- Managers and advisers have a good awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities. They have received recent and relevant training to refresh and reinforce their understanding. Advisers use their training to help keep customers safe from the dangers of radicalisation, extremism and when using the internet. Managers take prompt action when required and use their strong links with relevant authorities to make appropriate referrals.
- Managers actively ensure that they learn from any incidents that occur and ensure that staff have the knowledge and skills required to deal with any situation. For example, staff have attended training on how to protect themselves from having harmful allegations made about them.

## Quality of information, advice and guidance

**Good**

- Advisers have good communication skills and are particularly adept at eliciting information from customers during individual sessions. As a result, customers generally contribute well to sessions and appreciate the time given to discuss their career aspirations. Advisers are highly skilled in helping customers to identify their existing knowledge and skills and how they can apply them to other circumstances, such as when changing career. They successfully encourage customers to take ownership of decision-making.
- Advisers engage very effectively with customers and are highly skilled in assessing their individual needs. Advisers have good in-depth knowledge of the local and regional labour market. They use this very effectively to signpost customers to relevant job vacancies and learning opportunities. For example, advisers use the accurate data on local and regional skills shortages to highlight potential job opportunities for customers.
- Well-qualified and experienced advisers structure individual sessions well to ensure that customers are able to share and reflect on the available range of career paths. Advisers direct customers to a good variety of resources to help them develop their job search and work skills, such as the National Careers Service website, local learning providers and volunteering opportunities. Most customers participate fully in sessions. As a result, customers are better empowered to follow these sessions up with their own independent research and applications.
- Advisers provide customers with helpful encouragement and feedback on what they need to do to improve their job search skills. They provide customers with helpful hints and tips on how to improve their curriculum vitae (CVs) and tailor the content so it is more relevant to specific jobs. Customers value the feedback they receive and become more confident in their ability to change their lives.
- Advisers adopt an appropriately non-judgemental approach, and value working with customers. They successfully identify and address customers' barriers to employment, particularly those who have not worked for a considerable period. For example, advisers deal sensitively with ex-offenders to help boost their self-worth and sense of direction during the probation period following release from custody. Customers who have specific additional support needs usually receive effective signposting to specialist agencies.
- Most advisers are adept at encouraging customers to undertake further training to develop their English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills where necessary. As a result, customers are better prepared to gain employment. For example, advisers encouraged one customer who was seeking employment in social care to work towards a level 2 qualification in English. However, in a few cases, advisers do not explore sufficiently customers' developmental needs in English, for example where it is not their first language.
- The large majority of advisers are highly effective at capturing the essence of their discussions with customers using the skills action plan. Customers invariably leave the session with a record of detailed action points and a clear appreciation of what is required to improve their future prospects. However, in a small minority of cases, targets in the plan are not specific enough to guarantee that customers can successfully use the plan to remind them what actions need completing after the session.

- In a small minority of cases, advisers do not plan and deliver group sessions well enough to ensure that all customers benefit fully from their attendance. Advisers are not sufficiently skilled at checking customers' understanding and progress. Consequently, not all customers engage fully in the session nor fully gain the skills they need that would help them in their decision-making.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

- Advisers, in most cases, very effectively support customers to take ownership of their personal decision-making. This results in customers gaining confidence and self-esteem. For example, advisers successfully help customers to enhance their research skills by introducing them to relevant paper-based and online resources. Customers take pride in explaining how this has helped them to develop investigative and analytical skills that they have successfully used to recognise additional career opportunities.
- The significant majority of customers who attend individual sessions are polite and respectful to advisers; they value highly the information and support they receive. During the sessions, most customers become more motivated to participate in the discussions. As a result, they openly identify their personal and social barriers to progression, which enables them to benefit fully from the available information, advice and guidance.
- Advisers sensitively promote customers' understanding of how to stay safe when using the internet and social media. Customers are able to apply this understanding well so that only appropriate information is included in CV and online job applications. Where it benefits the customer to have a more in-depth appreciation, advisers expertly link discussions to appropriate legislation such as the Data Protection and Equalities Act 2010.
- Customers understand the importance of punctual attendance as a key employability skill. Advisers remind customers of forthcoming appointments, for example by text, telephone or email. However, in a small number of instances, predominantly within Jobcentre Plus venues, customers fail to attend appointments.
- Customers develop an appropriate awareness of fundamental British values. Advisers act as effective role models.

## Outcomes for customers

**Good**

- The rate at which customers achieve their target of securing sustained employment or further learning or development is high. Managers' actions to raise these rates have been effective and exceed the targets established by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).
- A high proportion of customers value the information, advice and guidance they receive. They can clearly identify how these help them to make appropriate choices leading to the selection of a preferred career pathway. As a result, customers generally have a more realistic understanding of how they can achieve their short- and long-term goals.
- Customers participating in individual and group sessions usually make good progress when compared to their starting points. For example, in an individual session, the adviser tactfully explored the customer's perception of the skills and qualifications they had achieved. As a result, the customer started to apply for more responsible and better-paid

jobs. In addition, the customer made the decision to improve their computer skills by applying to attend a relevant ICT course. In a group session, customers who had been unemployed for a considerable time had an incorrect understanding of the purpose and content of a CV. Advisers supported them to gain a better understanding of what to include in a CV and how to use it to promote themselves within the job market.

- Leaders and managers collect and appropriately evaluate data to assess the performance of different customer groups. Managers accurately identify gaps in the progress of specific customer cohorts, and undertake relevant remedial action where necessary. In a few cases, the pace of implementation has not been quick enough. For example, training to improve advisers' professional practice in dealing with customers who have impaired mental health has been too slow.

## Provider details

Unique reference number	1236937
Type of provider	National Careers Service
Chief Executive Officer	John Yarham
Telephone number	0115 960 1566
Website	<a href="http://www.futuresadvice.co.uk">www.futuresadvice.co.uk</a>

At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:

- Realise Futures
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Evolve Your Future
- Central Bedfordshire Authority
- Ascend
- Prospects Ltd
- Watford Women's Centre
- The Mallows Company
- Thames Valley Rehabilitation Company
- City College Peterborough



## Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the director of people, improvement and partnerships, 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 other stakeholders; these views are reflected within the report. They observed one-to-one adviser sessions and group sessions. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

## Inspection team

Nigel Bragg, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Rob Mottram	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Carolyn Brownsea	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Sharpe	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 2017