

Futures Advice, Skills and Employment

National Careers Service

Inspection dates

24–27 January 2017

Overall effectiveness		Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding	
Quality of information, advice and guidance	Outstanding	
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding	
Outcomes for customers	Outstanding	

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding provider

- Customers make excellent progress towards successfully achieving their career aspirations, as advisers are highly adept at removing barriers to achievement.
- Very knowledgeable and experienced advisers are excellent at empowering customers to develop greater independence through the acquisition of very useful attributes such as good research and decision-making skills.
- Customers greatly value the help they receive from advisers which inspires them to develop very positive attitudes that transform their lives.
- Customers make excellent gains in personal and social development that enhance their employability.
- Both individual and group sessions attended by customers are of a consistently very high quality and support them into jobs and learning.
- Advisers are highly skilled at defining customers' starting points and using well-designed targets to move them swiftly to successful outcomes.
- Customers acquire a particularly good understanding of how important English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are to secure employment; they actively participate in skills development opportunities.
- Leaders and managers are highly ambitious for the service and deftly use a self-critical culture that is unrelenting in its pursuit of a high-quality experience for all customers.
- Partnership working is exceptionally effective, as is the use of quality arrangements to raise standards for all customers.
- Significant areas for improvement are few and have a minimum impact on the customers' experience.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Futures Advice, Skills and Employment hold the National Careers Service contract for the East Midlands region that includes Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire. The company is a not-for-profit company owned by Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. The head office is located in Nottingham city centre.
- The company largely delivers the National Careers Service contract using its own advisers but subcontracts around 10% of the delivery to other organisations. Overall, advisers meet with in excess of 40,000 customers each year at one of 39 Jobcentre Plus offices, seven careers centre or 28 community venues.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers should ensure that all:
 - advisers routinely check customers' understanding during group sessions to promote and reinforce their understanding
 - stakeholders are fully involved in the validation of the final self-assessment report
 - advisers fully record every target they negotiate with customers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Highly skilled leaders and managers unrelentingly focus on providing an outstanding quality of information, advice and guidance for all customers. Board members and the senior management team set and achieve very high and ambitious expectations for staff and customers.
- The service's aspirational organisational culture is excellent at changing customers' lives for the better. All staff and managers enthusiastically contribute to the pivotal role they play in helping the governing board realise the service's mission and vision.
- Partnership working is exceptionally effective. For example, across the region collaborative working with Jobcentre Plus is highly productive. As a result, customers receive seamless support that helps them to gain their desired job or learning outcome.
- Managers' use of quality assurance and improvement arrangements is outstanding as measured by the results they achieve. They constantly look for ways to improve the customers' experience. The pace at which they identify and enact improvement actions is impressive. Quality assurance of advice sessions through direct observation results in reliable and valid assessment. Managers very successfully use this as a development tool to set and achieve even greater improvements to the provision's quality.
- Managers quickly rationalise processes to maximise efficiency using demanding critical review, so customers consistently receive high-quality individualised help. As a result, customers make excellent progress in achieving their short- and long-term targets.
- Managers continuously scan the sector for good practice and make rapid use of this information to provide highly effective improvements. For example, managers introduced good improvements to session quality evaluation so that observers now make detailed checks on the impact of advice sessions on customers' plans.
- The performance management of subcontractors is outstanding. Managers make use of a particularly wide range of data to rigorously monitor subcontractors and hold them to account. Their use of live updated information on the performance of each subcontractor, centre and adviser is particularly effective in driving up standards. Performance management of the service's direct delivery is excellent. Managers work closely with all advisers to set and achieve challenging objectives that benefit customers. Managers, in their pursuit of achieving these goals, support and nurture advisers very well.
- Managers work extremely well with the local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) to ensure that they achieve, and usually exceed, their respective targets. Managers rightly use this mutual collaboration to prioritise the ongoing identification of information that can support customers' success. For example, they collect detailed intelligence on local and regional employment sectors that are experiencing recruitment difficulties and/or employment growth. Managers adeptly utilise this information to help advisers develop their professional practice. Consequently, advisers make excellent use of labour market intelligence to allow customers to target their employment and training applications.
- The Careers Inspirations project is excellent at promoting the awareness of employment and training opportunities to secondary school pupils. Managers have produced high-quality resources to support this work. The promotion and relevance to pupils' future

careers in science, technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects are very good.

- All advisers receive extensive training and development that are very effective in raising professional standards. Advisers are extremely well qualified and highly skilled. Managers provide particularly good support to ensure that advisers develop their skills in identifying the needs of the customers and barriers to achieving their aspirations.
- Leaders and managers have a sound and detailed understanding of the service and the region it serves. The self-assessment report contains a very accurate analysis of the service's quality. Managers make very effective use of the associated action plan to deliver a particularly rapid pace of improvement. However, managers do not invite the full range of stakeholders to feed back their views on the self-assessment report prior to its publication.

The governance of the provider

- Board members provide highly effective challenge that holds the senior management team to account for the service's performance. They take a very keen interest in the quality of the information, advice and guidance received by customers. They personally assess this by visiting group and individual advice sessions, as well as speaking with customers and advisers.
- Board members provide managers with very useful support as part of their commitment to ensuring that customers get the best possible experience. For example, the board has recently helped managers to refine the customer satisfaction surveys so that they more effectively evaluate the impact of the service on customers' lives. In addition, members act as excellent advocates for the service when dealing with other organisations.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Service activities take place within a caring culture that emphasises the importance of safeguarding all staff and customers. Advisers and managers have a sound awareness of what constitutes effective safeguarding. They know well how to identify and report safeguarding concerns. Customers feel safe and are confident that managers will act upon any raised concerns.
- Advisers take all necessary steps to raise customers' awareness of how to stay safe. They are particularly good at raising customers' appreciation of the dangers posed by extremism, radicalisation and lax cyber security.
- Staff are highly skilled at taking prompt and sensitive action to address customers' challenging comments or behaviour. For example, an adviser dealt very effectively with customers' hostile responses to questions about their status as citizens of the European Union. Subsequently, managers successfully used the incident as a case study to share expertise with other staff.

Quality of information, advice and guidance

Outstanding

- Extremely skilled advisers routinely deliver excellent assessments of customers' starting points. Advisers have exemplary communication skills. They use them to listen intently to customers and skilfully paraphrase discussions. This allows both parties to check

thoroughly their mutual understanding of the assessment and agree well thought out next steps. Advisers make very good use of this process to identify correctly customers' individual requirements.

- Advisers provide a very high standard of support for customers with additional needs and learning difficulties. Following a particularly detailed analysis, advisers appropriately signpost customers to specialist agencies. In a typical case, a customer with significant mental health conditions and financial difficulties received excellent targeted support. The life-changing help received allowed the individual to overcome major personal problems and successfully gain a job.
- Highly qualified and experienced advisers plan and deliver individual advice sessions to a consistently outstanding standard. Advisers are enthusiastic and have very high expectations of their customers. They make particularly good use of a wide range of helpful and good-quality resources to help customers to improve and tailor their applications for specific career opportunities.
- Advisers plan and deliver group sessions exceptionally well. Most customers actively participate in group discussions and activities. They enjoy the experience and are often motivated to seek out further learning opportunities to support their progression to sustained employment. Advisers use a very good variety of resources and activities to improve customers' understanding. For example, after watching a video clip on internet safety, customers' appreciation of safe social media use was significantly improved. However, in a very small minority of incidences, advisers do not check customers' understanding well enough.
- Advisers make excellent use of customers' skills analysis to help them progress. For example, an adviser successfully engaged customers' interest using a short test to identify their existing skills and qualities. This allowed the customers to develop a deeper understanding of how different skill sets apply to a range of job roles. In another case, an adviser supported a customer to identify the skills he had gained through both employment and his personal life. The adviser expertly facilitated the customer's exploration and use of this knowledge so that he could assess his suitability for self-employment.
- Advisers ensure that customers make significant strides in identifying and addressing their English, mathematics and ICT skills development needs. Customers are able to articulate clearly how their newly developed skills will improve their employability. Advisers use their very extensive knowledge of local learning providers to refer customers to appropriate help that allows them to develop quickly. For example, within a week of an advice session a customer had received English and mathematics skills assessments and commenced a programme to raise her skills levels. Following an advice session, a customer enrolled on an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) course to help improve his jobsearch skills and future promotion prospects in the security industry.
- Advisers establish a high standard of rapport with customers and adopt a non-judgemental approach. Within group sessions, this successfully encourages customers to value and accept each other's opinions. Customers, working in diverse groups, feel appreciated and are very respectful of each other. Advisers use real-life scenarios very effectively to develop customers' understanding of equality and diversity.
- Advisers deliver sessions in high-quality venues that maximise easy access for all customers. In addition, advisers make very effective use of telephone, email and social

media contact to support customers in making decisions about their future.

- All advisers negotiate short- and long-term goals with customers that are very effective in supporting future progress. Most actions recorded by advisers are detailed and specific. As a result, customers make very good progress and improve their life and career chances. In a very few instances, advisers do not fully record all agreed targets or actions. This slows progress for a few customers who are then not able to use the skills action plan as a reminder of what they have to do and by when.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

- Customers make excellent progress in building their confidence and personal worth through their advisers' sensitive and caring coaching. This helps them to develop the personal and social skills that employers prize. For example, customers become more attentive and respond extremely well to questioning. Excellent improvements in personal effectiveness motivate customers to make changes that dramatically improve their personal lives.
- Customers gain significant self-assurance in speaking about their personal experiences, skills and knowledge. They are quickly able to link this to an analysis of what they could contribute to their future aspirations for employment. Advisers skilfully ensure that customers recognise they have acquired a new range of high-level skills that reflect a significant enhancement to their interview technique and overall employment prospects. This makes a very good contribution to improving customers' employability.
- Advisers are very successful in empowering customers to develop their research skills by, for example, introducing them to the National Careers Service website and local recruitment agencies. Customers value greatly the help they receive and can identify the significant improvements they have made to their employability.
- Customers develop highly effective decision-making skills. Advisers keep customers fully informed by sharing their exceptionally good knowledge of available employment, learning and training opportunities. Customers quickly take ownership of their decision-making. They exhibit a good ability to assess how well they could balance the competing demands should they commit to a particular action. For example, customers are encouraged to reflect on how they will manage their study should they embark on industry-focused training opportunities to help them change career.
- Customers are punctual, attend scheduled appointments and fully recognise the importance of this behaviour in gaining and maintaining employment. The vast majority of customers are very responsive within group sessions and arrive prepared to work. They engage with each other very well. Customers are often confident enough to make very useful and thought-provoking contributions by sharing their own experiences. Most make excellent progress in developing reflective skills that assist realistic decision-making.
- The large majority of customers demonstrate a very clear understanding of fundamental British values. They have a clear awareness of how they can apply these values as a citizen and an employee.

Outcomes for customers

Outstanding

- Customers make excellent progress in achieving their agreed goals from their different starting points. New Jobcentre Plus claimants swiftly move to participation in group information sessions. Advisers are highly effective in using this activity to refer customers for appropriately individualised information, advice and guidance. Advisers are unrelenting in following up customers to offer further support. This ensures that customers quickly complete their action plans so that they are fully prepared for the next stage of their career.
- Customers value highly the help they receive. They are extremely satisfied with both its quality and the contribution it makes to preparing them for the next stage of their education, training and/or employment. Customers talk animatedly about how their experience has helped them develop and learn. For example, a customer enthusiastically identified how the adviser inspired him to address his social isolation through participation in local community activities. As a result, he was motivated to attend curriculum vitae development sessions, made excellent gains in improving his information technology skills and secured job interviews with local employers.
- Managers make excellent use of data to evaluate the performance of customer cohorts. There are no significant differences in the achievement and progress of different customer groups. The service has been particularly successful in engaging specific groups and ensuring that they succeed fully. For example, minority ethnic customers in Leicester and Leicestershire make very good use of the service and achieve their short- and long-term goals at a very high rate.
- Advisers have been highly effective in ensuring that customers with significant personal barriers successfully enter the job market. For example, in Nottingham, help for long-term unemployed customers and those with mental health conditions is exceptionally strong. Outstandingly effective liaison with employers has led to a very high rate of customers securing employment in a relatively short time.
- Advice sessions add substantial value to customers' achievements, with impressively high progression rates where customers have participated in up to three sessions.
- A high and improving proportion of customers enter sustained work, accredited learning or training. The rates are consistently far higher than the targets established by the Skills Funding Agency. The rate at which customers gain employment is particularly high.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1236942
Type of provider	National Careers Service
CEO	John Yarham
Telephone number	0115 9601 566
Website	www.futuresadvice.co.uk

Provider information at the time of the inspection

At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Derbyshire County Council■ Leicester College■ Prospects Ltd■ New College Stamford
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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
Jean Webb	Ofsted Inspector
Maureen Deary	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
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Manchester
M1 2WD

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