

Economic Solutions Limited Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Warrington and Staffordshire

National Careers Service

Inspection dates

31 January – 3 February 2017

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

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Exceptional management of subcontracted provision.
- Rigorous collection and analysis of data ensure that any differences in performance between different groups of customers are identified quickly and appropriate action is taken to narrow achievement gaps.
- The positive attitudes of customers mean that they gain high levels of self-confidence and new knowledge and skills to support and improve their future employment prospects.
- Priority customers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and exceed targets for jobs and learning outcomes.
- Experienced and well-qualified advisers, with extensive local knowledge, work skilfully with a diverse range of customers to help them progress.
- Wide-ranging, high-quality staff development ensures that advisers are able to provide customers with good information, advice and guidance to help them make informed decisions about learning and jobs.
- Very effective partnership arrangements mean that advisers have in-depth knowledge of the skills and employment priorities in Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Warrington and Staffordshire, which they use to support customers into jobs and learning.
- Too many customers do not attend their one-to-one sessions with advisers.
- The quality of skills action plans is not consistently high and targets to support customers into jobs and learning are not always challenging or meaningful enough.
- Advisers do not always promote English, mathematics and information communication technology well enough or support customers to develop their independent research skills further in order to enhance employment prospects.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Economic Solutions Limited holds the National Careers Service contract for Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Warrington and Staffordshire (GMCWS). The head office is based in Manchester city centre. The company is a not-for-profit company with a private, sector-led board.
- Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS is the prime contractor and delivers directly through the Work Company. Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS also manages two subcontractors. Advisers meet approximately 40,000 customers each year in a wide range of venues, including Jobcentre Plus offices and community venues.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the quality of skills action plans is consistently high and targets are challenging and meaningful, particularly for those with higher-level qualifications or substantial work experience.
- Increase customer attendance rates at one-to-one sessions with advisers in order for more customers to progress into learning or jobs.
- Ensure that advisers actively promote English, mathematics and information communications technology (ICT) to support customers in developing their skills in order to enhance employment prospects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers successfully communicate to all staff and subcontractors their strong ambition and determination to offer high-quality information, advice and guidance for customers. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities well and maintain high standards and good levels of performance. As a result of the successful implementation of detailed and robust plans for contract delivery, contractual targets are met and often exceeded.
- Management of subcontractors is exceptional. Leaders and managers with strategic oversight of Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS have developed and implemented comprehensive arrangements to monitor all aspects of the work of subcontractors exceptionally well. Performance targets are met consistently because leaders and managers skilfully support subcontractors, challenging where necessary, to ensure high standards. As a result of regular and highly productive performance management meetings with subcontractors, customers receive high-quality information, advice and guidance in a range of community and Jobcentre Plus venues. Managers support subcontractors very well, for example, subcontractor staff benefit from outstanding professional development activities through Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS. Highly successful performance management has resulted in the termination of subcontracting arrangements when the performance of subcontractors has been poor. Leaders and managers have been particularly skilful in ensuring that customers continue to receive high-quality information, advice and guidance during the transfer of contracts to new subcontractors.
- Managers and subcontractors have developed effective and productive partnerships with Jobcentre Plus which benefit customers well. Partnership working with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), particularly in Staffordshire and Greater Manchester, has been highly effective. Consequently, managers and advisers have an in-depth knowledge of skills and employment priorities across the region and use this information well to provide advice and guidance to customers about training and employment opportunities.
- Senior managers have successfully developed and implemented an exceptionally well-considered and comprehensive continuing professional development programme for staff. Staff, including subcontractor staff, benefit from a wide range of activities to improve their practice in providing high-quality information, advice and guidance to customers. Many advisers report that because of the high-quality training they receive, they are better prepared to support customers, particularly those with highly complex needs. As a result, Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS meets targets for jobs and learning outcomes and exceeds them for priority customers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Economic Solutions Limited GMCSW meets or exceeds targets for customer satisfaction and career management.
- The process for self-assessment is effective and inclusive. Subcontractors contribute well to the self-assessment report, which is evaluative and identifies most of the strengths and areas for development identified during inspection. The quality improvement plan, drawn from the findings of the self-assessment report, is detailed and comprehensive and is an effective tool for further improving the quality of provision. However, managers'

evaluations of the effectiveness of leadership and management and outcomes for customers are too optimistic.

- Senior managers have implemented appropriate quality assurance systems to monitor and improve the quality of information, advice and guidance that customers receive. Robust arrangements for the observation of information, advice and guidance mean that senior managers have a detailed and accurate knowledge of the strengths and areas for improvement across the whole provision, including subcontracted provision. However, managers have not ensured that improvements are implemented quickly or well enough. Good practice is not yet shared consistently between all advisers.
- Leaders and managers promote a culture of tolerance and inclusivity across the provision well. They monitor differences in performance between different groups of customers and have successfully reduced achievement gaps. Advisers respect customers' differences and appropriately promote diversity. Advisers are aware of their responsibilities in enhancing customers' understanding of the values of living in a modern British society. However, they are not yet fully confident in promoting these values well enough in their discussions with customers.

The governance of the provider

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

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 threats 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 are very experienced and well qualified. They are skilled at working with a diverse range of customers, from graduates to those with lower educational attainment and very limited, or no, work experience. Advisers have a very good knowledge of local job opportunities and training courses and most of them use this knowledge very effectively when advising customers. They respond readily to customers' wishes, needs and aspirations to ensure that the sessions are of maximum benefit to customers.
- Advisers quickly develop a good working relationship with customers. They give a clear introduction to the session, including a good overview of the National Careers Service, its core values and how customers can benefit from the service. Most advisers collect and record customers' personal details sensitively and accurately.
- Many advisers assess customers' needs competently. For example, an adviser who was

working with a customer whose long-term goal was to obtain a degree in nursing studies, considered all her potential needs in order to give her good advice about the most appropriate courses to gain access to a degree programme. The adviser also ensured that the customer considered funding options and the support she may require while studying.

- Most advisers give customers good encouragement to take responsibility for following the actions identified on their skills action plans and for monitoring their own progress.
- Many advisers use a good range of skills when helping, advising and guiding customers. They skilfully question customers to help them identify their key skills, work experience and occupational preferences. Advisers effectively encourage customers to consider their vocational preferences and training options very carefully. Most advisers summarise periodically during the session in order to give a good concluding summary.
- Advisers give very good advice to customers about compiling and modifying their curricula vitae (CVs) and about writing accompanying letters. They are very knowledgeable about what employers look for in a CV and how best to present them. Advisers give particularly good advice about tailoring CVs to specific job vacancies and about identifying customers' transferable and life skills.
- Advisers make good use of online job profiles for illustrating the different types of jobs in, for example, health care and the skills and experience needed when applying for them. However, they make insufficient use of a wider range of electronic resources, including work- and training-related websites, such as those for letter-writing and CV-building.
- The accommodation for National Careers Service one-to-one and group sessions is mostly of good quality. Advisers and customers are able to use a private office or a quiet area in many Jobcentre Plus offices. However, in a minority of Jobcentre Plus offices too much interference from adjacent work areas makes concentration difficult. In most venues, the National Careers Service is promoted clearly through posters and brochures. Venues are appropriately located throughout the region and accessible to customers, including those with limited mobility.
- Most advisers are adept at producing skills action plans for customers. They work with customers very effectively to identify their current competencies and their short-, medium- and long-term personal and vocational goals. However, too many skills action plans contain grammatical and typographical errors and irrelevant information about what customers have previously done. Advisers do not record fully the advice that they give to customers and too many skills action plans do not contain targets that are sufficiently challenging to customers, especially those with higher-level qualifications and substantial work experience.
- Advisers have a good awareness and understanding of the 'Prevent' duty, British values, equality and diversity, and safeguarding which, in most cases, underpins their professional practice. However, advisers do not raise customers' awareness and understanding of these concepts sufficiently. Advisers do not consistently remind customers about the importance of staying safe online.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Advisers provide learners with an impartial, confidential service. Advisers are welcoming and professional and they treat customers with dignity and respect. Customers appreciate this approach and respond appropriately. They become more self-confident and self-

assured as sessions progress.

- 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.
- Customers attend sessions punctually and their conduct is excellent. Their positive attitudes have a strong impact on the progress they make within the sessions. Customers are keen to obtain employment. Their knowledge of what they have to do to improve their job prospects improves considerably during the session. They become increasingly aware that they have the potential to become successful employees, often with good promotion prospects.
- Although most customers understand the importance of improving their English, mathematics and ICT to enhance their personal effectiveness and vocational efficiency, and are very receptive to the advice they are given, advisers do not always promote English, mathematics and ICT sufficiently well. Advisers do not always encourage customers to continue to develop their English, mathematical and ICT knowledge and skills further and, consequently, enhance their employment prospects.
- Too many customers do not attend the information, advice and guidance sessions that have been previously arranged for them, especially in Jobcentre Plus offices, despite advisers texting and phoning to remind them about the appointment. This has a negative impact on their personal and vocational development and on their progress towards employment.

Outcomes for learners

Good

- Customers make good progress from their starting points as they quickly gain new knowledge and skills and improve their chances of securing employment or enhancing their career prospects. Customers demonstrate their willingness to follow the good, impartial advice and guidance they receive. They listen carefully to advisers' guidance and ask thoughtful questions. Customers value highly the information, advice and guidance they receive and are highly motivated to achieve targets set in skills action plans in order to gain employment.
- Stringent management of a wide range of data ensures that Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS meets its targets for jobs and learning outcomes. Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS meets, and often exceeds, targets for customer satisfaction and career management set by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). Most customers are satisfied with the service they receive from Economic Solutions Limited GMCWS and are able to make informed choices, with good levels of support from advisers, about their next steps in employment and learning.
- Leaders and managers stringently collect and analyse data about the performance of different groups of customers, including those in subcontracted provision. As a result, differences in the performance of different groups of customers are identified quickly and actions implemented to ensure that there are no significant achievement gaps.
- Advisers effectively track the destinations of customers through the telephone tracking team. Advisers telephone and email all customers following National Careers Service interventions to track and monitor the progress they make into learning and jobs and to

offer further support if needed.

- The performance of priority groups of customers is skilfully analysed and additional support provided, if needed, to ensure that customers make good progress in accessing training or entering employment. Consequently, the performance of customers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities exceeds targets for jobs and learning outcomes set by the SFA.
- Although advisers support customers well to develop research skills such as job profiles in one-to-one sessions, customers do not routinely develop good independent study skills outside of sessions, for example conducting website and job searches and further developing CVs independently.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1236935
Type of provider	National Careers Service
Principal/CEO	Mark Hughes
Telephone number	0161 245 4948
Website	www.manchester-enterprises.co.uk
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	Prospects Services Career Connect

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 learners and employers; 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

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