

Prospects London

National Careers Service

Inspection dates

14–17 March 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	

Summary of key findings

This is a good provider

- Advisers act as positive role models, providing a non-judgemental environment in which customers feel safe and valued.
- Advisers provide good support to customers to help them analyse their prior experience and skills, thereby enabling them to develop the insight, independence and confidence they need to progress towards, or into, training or employment.
- Managers compile accurate labour market information, which they share widely with advisers who make good use of it to ensure that the advice and guidance they provide meet the priorities of customers and local communities.
- Through carefully planned subcontracting and valuable partnership arrangements, advisers are able to meet the needs of specific groups within the region, some of which represent the more disadvantaged members of their communities.
- Advisers are skilled at dealing with the culturally diverse needs of the region, and also at working with a significant proportion of customers who have low levels of spoken English to support them into training or employment.
- Advisers do not consistently promote and encourage customers' further development of English, mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- Too many customers fail to attend their scheduled appointments.
- A small minority of newly recruited advisers are slow to gain the skills and knowledge they require to provide a high-quality information, advice, and guidance service from the outset.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Prospects holds the National Careers Service (NCS) contract for the London region, which covers all 33 of the London local authorities. The head office is located in Bromley.
- The London NCS region is the highest populated and culturally most diverse region in the country. Prospects is the prime contractor and manages delivery in partnership with 19 subcontractors. Advisers meet around 80,000 customers each year in approximately 150 venues across London. Customers who use the service reflect London's culturally diverse population.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Advisers should consider more often, and in greater detail, the need for customers to improve their English, mathematical and ICT skills, which may be potential barriers to customers' ability to progress.
- Managers should continue exploring strategies to improve attendance, and support advisers in their efforts to get customers to attend promptly.
- Managers should ensure that subcontractors provide high-quality training and timely support to all newly recruited advisers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders and managers have successfully developed an effective careers service across London. The organisation has been successful in securing positive job and learning outcomes, particularly for priority groups such as lower skilled adults and those at risk of redundancy.
- Leaders and managers have developed, and continue to maintain, strong and effective partnerships with a broad range of agencies across the region, including the local authorities, London Economic Action Partnership and the Greater London Authority. This helps to ensure that customers, employers, partners and schools recognise the importance of the NCS, enabling the service to be a key element in the region's workforce management strategy. Through a good 'Inspiration' programme, delivered by NCS advisers, young people in schools and colleges gain sound insight into career options across many different employment sectors.
- Managers have established effective partnerships with Jobcentre Plus. Colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions collaborate closely with managers from the careers service to ensure that the two organisations provide a one-stop service to customers. Work coaches from job centres and advisers from the careers service work well together to provide a thorough professional service to customers.
- Managers have successfully established and manage a very broad network of subcontractors. This is particularly beneficial and it helps advisers to meet the specific needs of different groups, some of which represent the most disadvantaged members of their communities. These include, for example, those with particularly low levels of prior education or skills, migrants and refugees, those who speak English as an additional language, and ex-offenders.
- Managers compile and disseminate to advisers particularly thorough labour market information. Advisers use this information very effectively to help customers identify the most suitable opportunities to meet their needs in their respective regions.
- Leaders, managers and board members maintain a strong focus on quality monitoring and improvement. Staff are generally aware of the relative strengths and weaknesses, and the key priorities to help maintain and improve the quality of the service.
- Most advisers are well qualified and experienced, with many holding both guidance and teaching qualifications. Advisers from across the regions speak a significant number of different languages. This helps the service overcome potential language barriers with those customers who have limited spoken English.
- The support and training for experienced staff are good. An extensive range of training, including short 'skills bite' programmes, webinars, coaching and sharing of best practice, helps advisers to update their skills and maintain a high-quality service.
- Staff turnover of advisers is high and managers have found recruitment and retention of

qualified staff a challenge. Managers continue to prioritise the recruitment and training of advisers. In a few instances however, subcontractors are slow to provide training and support to their newly recruited advisers. Consequently, these advisers are comparatively slow to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, qualifications and confidence to enable them to provide consistently high-quality information, advice and guidance across all of the service.

The governance of the provider

- The quality of governance is good. The board members have substantial experience in education, employment, training and careers guidance. They are passionate about promoting the mission of the company and give their time and expertise generously to raise the profile of the service by networking and maintaining the strong links with employers, local authorities and voluntary groups. They receive regular reports from managers on organisational performance which they scrutinise, challenging and supporting the managers to maintain a high-quality service.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective.
- Staff have good awareness of safeguarding, the risks associated with extremism and radicalisation and the importance of internet safety. Advisers make good use of this knowledge to raise customers' awareness of these issues and to provide them with appropriate guidance where required.
- Managers take prompt action to address any safeguarding concerns raised and refer cases to specialist safeguarding partners where necessary. Customers indicate that they find the centres welcoming, and feel safe when they attend information, advice and guidance sessions.

Quality of information, advice and guidance

Good

- Advisers are non-judgemental and show good empathy towards customers, understanding their personal and diverse needs very well. Advisers skilfully encourage customers to identify their own barriers to progression in learning and employment. For example, a single parent who had been a home carer since leaving school was encouraged to undertake voluntary work in a local charity shop to help overcome her fears and increase her confidence by being in a work environment for the first time. Most advisers also make good use of their listening and exploratory questioning techniques to support customers.
- Advisers lead discussions skilfully to capture key skills and personal attributes from customers, and use this information to help them identify potential and realistic job and learning goals. Advisers also help customers to identify how the skills they have gained through employment in one industry, such as project management, can be applied to other sectors.
- Advisers negotiate actions very successfully with most customers, encouraging them to propose their own short- and long-term goals, resulting in them developing good

ownership of their actions.

- Most advisers are very experienced. They have good knowledge of courses and job opportunities in the local area, which they use very effectively to give impartial information and advice to the very diverse range of customers who use the service.
- Advisers give very good support to help customers produce high-quality CVs, and good advice and guidance to enable them to perform successfully in job interviews. Advisers make very good use of online resources to raise customers' awareness of relevant job roles, apprenticeships or voluntary work. As a result, customers have a good awareness of the wider options available to them.
- The majority of customers receive useful action plans that clearly reflect discussions with advisers and set out specific, relevant and time-bound actions to help them make progress. In a small minority of sessions, advisers do not recap the discussions or decisions well enough to check customers' understanding of what they need to do next.
- Advisers build good links with partners, including libraries and community organisations, so advice sessions are appropriately located in accessible venues. In a few centres, advisers do not have access to private offices in the event of needing to have a confidential conversation with a customer.
- Most advisers promote equality and diversity and British values confidently. However, a very small minority of less experienced advisers tend to lack confidence to discuss with customers issues related to working in London's very diverse, multicultural society.
- In the majority of sessions, advisers promote successfully the further development of English, mathematical and ICT skills, encouraging customers to access appropriate courses. However, in a small minority of sessions, advisers' approach is too cursory. In these sessions they do not check customers' skills in sufficient detail or promote the necessary improvements effectively enough.
- In a few instances, advisers tend to rush sessions and do not listen sufficiently to customers to understand fully their individual needs or barriers. This is particularly the case for those customers with low-level qualifications, and those with particularly low levels of written and spoken English.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

- Customers are polite and respectful, and value the impartial guidance they receive from advisers. Most customers enjoy their information, advice and guidance sessions and respond positively to instructions and requests from advisers. For example, customers are keen to learn how they might raise the quality of their CVs and improve their interview skills to increase their chances of gaining a job.
- Most advisers inspire and engage customers successfully to ensure that they adopt positive attitudes to seeking suitable training, employment or career opportunities. As a result, customers become more motivated, participate fully in discussions, and are more

willing to pursue alternative options for employment, such as volunteering, apprenticeships or self-employment. For example, one customer was keen to take up the opportunity to volunteer in a childcare setting to improve her vocational and work-related skills. Another customer, under the careful guidance of a skilled adviser, explored the potential routes to securing an apprenticeship in administration.

- Advisers help customers to develop greater self-confidence. They support and encourage customers who have been out of work for a significant period of time to restore their self-esteem and motivation.
- Advisers are good role models for their customers and provide a safe, welcoming, non-judgemental environment in which customers participate enthusiastically and feel safe. Customers indicate that they feel safe, valued and respected, and are generally aware of how to keep themselves safe. Advisers challenge issues of stereotyping or diversity as they arise, for example when customers state that they are too old to learn or when they suggest that only men get jobs in engineering.
- Most advisers develop customers' independence successfully, for example by guiding them to appropriate sources of careers-related information and empowering them to take ownership of their target setting and job searches. As a result, these customers are more aware of the options open to them and understand better how they can become more responsible for improving their life chances. Occasionally, however, advisers do not help customers to take enough responsibility for their own progress. As a result, a few customers are slower to develop the level of autonomy and independence they require to make good progress.
- Most customers appreciate the importance of developing their English, mathematical and ICT skills to help increase their career opportunities. For example, an adviser referred a customer to a local training provider to take an English qualification at level 2, as she was planning a career change to social care and needed a recognised qualification. In a few cases, advisers fail to identify customers' English, mathematical or ICT skills gaps sufficiently. As a result, a small minority of customers do not develop the skills and self-confidence they need, for example to apply for jobs online.
- While advisers work hard to improve attendance by contacting their customers by text, telephone or email in advance of their appointments, attendance is too low and not all customers attend punctually.

Outcomes for customers

Good

- Most customers make good progress relative to their starting points. Advisers skilfully

support customers to identify the training, job-preparation or job-search skills they require. They provide good assistance in helping them to develop a suitable CV and action plan, and direct them to resources they can use to find appropriate training or to seek employment. As a result, most customers leave their meetings with advisers having developed greater autonomy and self-confidence, and a clearer knowledge and understanding of how to improve their chances of making progress towards gaining employment.

- Advisers provide valuable additional support to customers, where appropriate, to identify and overcome any personal or practical barriers they may have, for example with childcare, housing or financial issues, which may otherwise constrain customers' ability to make progress.
- Managers ensure that the organisation is fulfilling the targets that have been set by, and agreed with, the Skills Funding Agency. Managers monitor the performance of customers, for example by gender and ethnicity, and ensure that there are no significant variations between these different groups.
- In a small minority of sessions, chiefly where job centres mandate customers to attend information, advice and guidance sessions, customers remain passive and do not develop the motivation or drive they require to make good progress.

Provider details

Unique reference number	1236946
Type of provider	National Careers Service
Age range of customers	19+
Approximate number of all customers over the previous full contract year	80,000
CEO	Mr Nick Bell
Telephone number	0208 315 1500
Website	www.prospects.co.uk
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	GGT Solutions Ltd Global Solutions Services Ltd Krypton Training Ltd The JGA Group New Challenge Ltd

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the area manager, 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

Peter Nelson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Harmesh Manghra	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gary Adkins	Ofsted Inspector
Marinette Bazin	Ofsted Inspector
Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Garai	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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