

Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited

Independent learning provider

Inspection dates

20–23 June 2017

Overall effectiveness		Requires improvement	
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement	16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement		
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement		
Outcomes for learners	Requires improvement		
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection		Good	

Summary of key findings

This is a provider that requires improvement

- Too many learners do not achieve their study programme qualifications.
- Tutors do not use knowledge of learners' starting points effectively to adapt their teaching and thus ensure that learners progress and develop according to their ability.
- Managers do not ensure that learners' work experience, especially for most learners in subcontractors, is planned sufficiently, so that learners are better prepared and gain more from their work placements.
- Too many learners do not attend their lessons regularly.
- Learners do not develop their written English and mathematics skills well enough.
- The management of subcontractors requires improvement to ensure that learners benefit from high-quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment require improvement, and the self-assessment is inaccurate.
- Board members do not receive accurate and reliable information about the quality of the provision. Consequently, they are not able to support and challenge senior managers to make improvements.
- Learners in subcontractors are not sufficiently aware of the threat posed by extreme ideologies.

The provider has the following strengths

- Learners develop good practical skills in a number of vocational areas such as dog grooming, animal care and dance.
- Most learners complete their vocational qualifications.
- Tutors support learners well to overcome or reduce their barriers to learning.
- Learners are very polite, respectful and helpful.
- Managers have successfully recruited many learners with barriers to participation in learning.

Full report

Information about the provider

- Brighter Futures Merseyside Limited (Brighter Futures) and its sister company Sysco Business Skills Academy Limited are separate trading entities, owned by Evolve Business Services Limited, and share a number of services such as finance and administration. Brighter Futures' offices and training centre are near Liverpool city centre. The company recruits learners from the Liverpool city region, Sefton and Knowsley, which contain some of the most deprived areas of England. The company employs 11 full-time staff and subcontracts about half of its provision.
- In 2016, fewer young people across the Liverpool city region left school with grades A* to C at GCSE, including English and mathematics, than the national average.

What does the provider need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, training, learning and assessment so that learners maximise their potential and achieve their qualifications by ensuring that tutors, including those in subcontractors, by:
 - using individual learners' starting points to plan and implement appropriate learning
 - setting learners detailed and challenging short-term targets so that they know what they need to do next
 - monitoring and reviewing learners' knowledge and skills development
 - improving learners' written English and mathematics skills.
- Improve the quality improvement arrangements, including those in subcontractors, by:
 - identifying accurately the strengths and weaknesses in teaching, training, learning and assessment, and use these to provide training that improves tutors' practices
 - evaluating thoroughly the quality of work placements and the skills that learners develop as a result of their work experience
 - ensuring that the self-assessment report uses reliable evidence to make accurate judgements, and that these inform specific actions to raise the quality of learners' experiences
 - sharing good practice.
- Improve attendance to lessons so that all learners attend regularly.
- Ensure that board members receive accurate information about learners' achievements and the quality of the provision, so that they can support and challenge senior managers.
- Ensure that tutors working in subcontractors are skilful in improving learners' depth of understanding of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders and managers do not have an accurate understanding of the quality of the provision, including that of their subcontractors. The information that they use does not provide them with a sufficiently accurate view of the overall performance of learners and the quality of lessons. Consequently, they do not implement improvement actions swiftly. Despite a number of recent improvements, such as the design of an enrichment programme for learners taught by Brighter Futures' own tutors, the quality of the provision has declined.
- Management of subcontractors requires improvement. Managers have developed extensive processes to recruit subcontractors and monitor and improve their performance. However, they focus on implementing these processes without evaluating the impact of their work on learners. For example, despite checks, regular visits and performance monitoring visits within the last two years, too many learners in subcontractors have not performed well. The performance of the largest subcontractor is not good enough. Managers do not ensure that subcontractors plan learners' work experience well and prepare all learners thoroughly for their work placements.
- Arrangements to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment do not lead to an improved learner experience. Although managers observe the quality of lessons regularly and check learners' work, they focus too much on processes rather than on the impact of activities on learners' skills development. They do not check sufficiently the quality of learners' work placements and the work that learners do while in placements. When they identify weak practices, they offer training and support for tutors to improve. However, too often, the pace of improvement is too slow. When good or better practices are identified, managers do not ensure that these are effectively and swiftly shared and implemented.
- The self-assessment report is not accurate because the evidence that managers use is not robust.
- Most learners benefit from study programmes that well reflect their interests. Managers are particularly successful in recruiting learners with barriers to participating in learning or with low attainment in their schools.
- Managers have recently recruited specialist tutors in English and mathematics and encouraged the largest subcontractor to do so as well. However, these measures have not yet had sufficient impact on learners' development of these key skills to support their further study or future employment.
- Staff, including staff in subcontractors, emphasise the importance of treating individuals fairly and with respect. As a result, learners develop a tolerant attitude to people of different backgrounds, other religions and sexual orientations. Managers have promoted effectively the values that help learners to live and work more successfully in modern Britain.

The governance of the provider

- Board members do not receive reliable and accurate information about the quality of courses and learners' performance. As a result, they do not have a sound oversight of learners' experiences and achievements to enable them to support and challenge senior managers to make improvements.
- Board members have sufficient expertise and capacity to carry out their roles and articulate their determination to challenge senior leaders to improve.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Managers are well aware of the potential for learners to encounter the risks associated with holding illegal extreme views or taking radical actions. Hence, they have ensured that policies and procedures, including those used by subcontractors, are effective in keeping learners safe. All staff, including the board members, have completed relevant training and are well aware of their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty.
- All staff in Brighter Futures and tutors in subcontractors have undergone Disclosure and Barring Service checks. Tutors focus well on good practices in health and safety, for example, while learners work on a farm or learn to lay concrete for rail track foundations.
- Most learners have a good understanding of the safe and appropriate use of the internet and social media. However, managers have not ensured that tutors in all subcontractors are skilful enough to develop learners' understanding of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Tutors assess the starting points of their learners at the beginning of the programme but too many do not use this information well enough to plan and implement learning. In too many instances, tutors do not set and monitor ambitious targets to ensure that learners achieve their potential. As a result, learners do not make rapid enough progress.
- Too often tutors set work or plan learning activities that are insufficiently stimulating or challenging for learners. For example, they set work that is too easy for the most able learners and too complex for learners with lower starting points than their peers. Consequently, the most able learners do not achieve well enough and learners with lower starting points struggle to keep up in lessons.
- Too many tutors do not use effective assessment methods in lessons to gain an accurate understanding of learners' progress. Tutors do not use questions well enough to encourage the full participation of everyone in lessons. This results in a small minority of learners dominating discussions with too many learners not demonstrating a good understanding of the topic. Too often, tutors do not assess or review learners' progress before moving on to new topics. Consequently, a large proportion of learners do not reflect on and consolidate their learning well enough.
- The feedback that tutors give learners about their work is often not clear or helpful enough. Learners are frequently not sure what they need to do to improve or to achieve at a higher level. Feedback following assessment does not develop many learners'

understanding of how they can improve their work to achieve more than the minimum requirements to pass their qualifications.

- Tutors do not develop learners' English skills well enough. They provide feedback on assessed work but do not ensure that learners use the feedback to improve their writing skills further. As a result, learners continue to make the same mistakes. A high proportion of learners are not making secure progress in developing this essential skill.
- Too many learners who are due to complete their study programmes very shortly have yet to complete meaningful work experience. Tutors, especially in subcontractors, have not ensured that these learners are prepared well for their work experience. For example, learners are not sufficiently clear about the particular skills that placement providers look for, or the skills that they need to develop to excel in their placements. Learners who have attended work experience enjoyed their experience and developed a better understanding of the subjects they studied and how they link to real business scenarios.
- Most tutors plan and implement activities that allow learners to apply and reinforce the skills they need for work. Learners develop their practical and communication skills well through effective coaching and demonstration by their well-qualified tutors.
- In practical lessons, tutors plan and use effective learning activities that enable the majority of learners to gain a good understanding of the correct technical terminology and skills used in their industry. For example, learners on land-based courses select the correct brushes and equipment for grooming horses. Learners on dog grooming courses work well in a commercial salon, carefully trimming and shampooing dogs to meet customers' specific requirements and industry time frames. Learners on business programmes identify the benefits of using mystery shopper activities.
- The large majority of learners develop adequately their use of mathematics in practical lessons. Tutors plan activities that allow learners to apply and reinforce the skills they need for work. For example, they set them tasks such as calculating the ratio of water to shampoo in dog grooming lessons, estimating the number of cement mix bags required to lay concrete on a rail track and conversion of measurements to build small animal shelter accommodation. However, too many learners do not develop their skills in English and mathematics to the standards required to pass their functional skills tests or improve their grades in their GCSEs in these subjects.
- Tutors promote a culture of mutual respect and celebrate diversity well. Learners discuss stereotyping and how this can result in inaccurate assumptions about people. Learners consider and reflect on the differences in cultures and religious festivals. On the very small number of occasions where learners use inappropriate language in lessons, tutors challenge this well and learners apologise for their behaviour to staff and peers.
- Tutors assess learners' individual personal support needs at the start of their programme and ensure that they receive effective support quickly. Additional support tutors provide effective support in lessons, which helps learners to overcome personal barriers and develop their technical skills. Staff often work closely with learners and their parents to enable learners to remain on their study programmes. Where staff identify a need, learners benefit from good specialist support from a range of local agencies, including support for mental health issues, substance misuse and financial matters. As a result, learners often overcome significant barriers to learning and make good progress in their personal and social skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

- Too many learners do not attend lessons regularly and consequently do not develop the skills that help them to sustain and progress in their future employment. In a few lessons, learners do not attend lessons on time. More recently, managers and tutors have started to monitor learners' attendance more effectively and are becoming more successful in improving the proportion of learners who attend regularly.
- Tutors do not routinely plan and implement learning that enables learners to improve their written English skills quickly enough. They do not motivate learners to check and correct their work themselves. As a result, this limits the development of the English skills that they need for higher levels of study or employment. Where learners have already achieved GCSEs in English and mathematics, they are not challenged sufficiently to develop their skills further.
- Too few learners on subcontracted provision benefit from careers guidance to help them make informed choices about further learning or employment after completing their study programmes.
- Learners have a good general awareness of the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism. However, most learners in subcontractors do not have a sufficient understanding of how radicalisation and extremism can affect their lives.
- Learners develop good vocationally relevant skills. For example, learners on performing arts courses develop a high level of skill in dance lessons. They work very well with music and skilfully choreograph dance moves. Learners display good standards of behaviour.
- Most learners enjoy a good range of enrichment activities that develop their personal and social skills well, raise their aspirations and enhance their work-related skills. For example, performing arts learners develop good team working and project management skills at a week-long international dance convention. Visiting motivational speakers inspire learners and, as a result, most learners are encouraged to work with determination to achieve their career aspirations. Learners are well informed about issues such as building positive relationships, substance misuse, health and well-being.

Outcomes for learners

Requires improvement

- In 2015/16, the proportion of learners aged 16 to 19 who achieved their study programme qualifications and in the planned time required improvement. Most learners completed their vocational qualifications, but too few were successful in their English and mathematics functional skills tests.
- For the last two consecutive years, very few learners taught by your subcontractors passed their qualifications. Brighter Futures has now stopped working with these poorly performing subcontractors.
- In 2015/16, the proportion of learners who successfully improved their grades or achieved grades A* to C in their GCSEs in English and mathematics was low.
- Too many current learners are not making the progress of which they are capable. The standard of most learners' work meets the basic requirements to achieve their

qualifications.

- Managers use data to monitor the performance of different groups of learners and have ensured that no specific group is disadvantaged. There are no significant achievement gaps between learners of different groups.
- A good proportion of learners on study programmes who complete their courses advance to further study, employment or training.

Provider details

Unique reference number	54725
Type of provider	Independent learning provider
Age range of learners	16–18
Approximate number of all learners over the previous full contract year	170
Managing director	Ian Smith
Telephone number	01512 361 748
Website	www.brighterfutures.uk.com

Provider information at the time of the inspection

Main course or learning programme level	Level 1 or below		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4 or above	
Total number of learners (excluding apprenticeships)	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+
	-	-	113					
Number of apprentices by apprenticeship level and age	Intermediate		Advanced		Higher			
	16–18	19+	16–18	19+	16–18	19+		
	-		-	-	-	-		
Number of traineeships	16–19		19+		Total			
	-		-		-			
Number of learners aged 14 to 16	-							
Number of learners for which the provider receives high-needs funding	-							
Funding received from:	Education and Skills Funding Agency							
At the time of inspection, the provider contracts with the following main subcontractors:	■ Jelli Theatre Arts College ■ Merseyside Career Development and Training ■ Pinehirst ■ Positive Future Consultancy Limited							

Information about this inspection

The inspection team was assisted by the managing director, as nominee. Inspectors took account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and the previous inspection report. 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 learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. The inspection took into account all relevant provision at the provider.

Inspection team

Shahram Safavi, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Maggie Fobister	Ofsted Inspector

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