

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Positive Outcomes Limited**

**28 September 2006**



ADULT LEARNING  
INSPECTORATE

## Adult Learning Inspectorate

The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) was established under the provisions of the *Learning and Skills Act 2000* to bring the inspection of all aspects of adult learning and work-based learning within the remit of a single inspectorate. The ALI is responsible for inspecting a wide range of government-funded learning, including:

- work-based learning for all people aged over 16
- provision in further education colleges for people aged 19 and over
- **learnirect** provision
- Adult and Community Learning
- training funded by Jobcentre Plus
- education and training in prisons, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons
- adult information, advice and guidance services (**nextstep**).

Inspections are carried out in accordance with the Common Inspection Framework by teams of full-time inspectors and part-time associate inspectors who have knowledge of, and experience in, the work which they inspect. All providers are invited to nominate a senior member of their staff to participate in the inspection as a team member.

## Pre-inspection analysis

The resources allocated to a cycle 2 inspection are primarily determined by the findings from the previous inspection. Account is also taken of information about achievement and retention obtained from the funding body, and any significant changes in the size or scope of the provision.

Where a provider has received good grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is relatively light. If the provider offers a number of areas of learning, a restricted sample is inspected.

Where a provider has received satisfactory grades in cycle 1, the cycle 2 inspection is less intensive and it is possible that not all areas of learning are included.

Where there are significant unsatisfactory grades from cycle 1, the intensity of the cycle 2 inspection is broadly the same as cycle 1, and all significant areas of learning are inspected.

Providers that have not previously been inspected will receive a full inspection.

## Overall effectiveness

The grades given for areas of learning and leadership and management will be used to arrive at a judgement about the overall effectiveness of the provider.

An **outstanding** provider should typically have leadership and management and at least half of the areas of learning judged to be a grade 1. All area of learning grades will be graded 1 or 2.

A **good** provider should have leadership and management and at least half of the area of learning grades judged to be a grade 2 or better. A good training provider should not have any grade 4s, and few grade 3s in the areas of learning.

A **satisfactory** provider should have adequate or better grades in leadership and management and in at least two thirds of the area of learning grades. An adequate provider might have a range of grades across areas of learning, some of which might be graded 4.

Provision will normally be deemed to be **inadequate** where more than one third of the area of learning grades and/or leadership and management are judged to be inadequate.

The final decision as to whether the provision is inadequate rests with the Chief Inspector of Adult Learning.

## Grading

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about the quality of provision in occupational/curriculum areas and Jobcentre Plus programmes, as well as to summarise their judgements about the quality of learning sessions. The same scale is used to describe the quality of leadership and management, which includes equality of opportunity and quality assurance. The descriptors for the four grades are:

- *grade 1 - outstanding*
- *grade 2 - good*
- *grade 3 - satisfactory*
- *grade 4 - inadequate*

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **Positive Outcomes Limited**

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## INSPECTION REPORT

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PROVIDER

1. Positive Outcomes Limited (PO) was established as a privately owned training provider in 1997. It offers training to around 450 learners and 190 companies across the East Midlands. Around 392 learners are aged 16 to 25 and are funded by Nottinghamshire Learning and Skills Council (LSC), and the remainder are commercial learners of all ages. The company offers apprenticeships and national vocational qualification (NVQ) training in the sector skill areas of business administration and law, which accounts for 338 learners, information and communication technology (ICT), and retail and commercial enterprise.

2. The company employs 31 people, including four directors, a general manager, six departmental managers, two marketing staff, two administrators, nine training advisers, two learning advisers, four internal verifiers who are also assessors, and one training consultant. It has one subcontractor, Hays, which delivers contact centre training to 23 apprentices. It has recently had a major management restructure, with operational responsibility and accountability now devolved to the general manager and six departmental managers who report to the general manager. The directors are responsible for the strategic direction of the company.

3. Nottinghamshire accounts for 20 per cent of the total population in the East Midlands. There is strong employment within the county, with unemployment at 2 per cent in August 2006, against a national average of 2.6 per cent. General education levels within the county are average, with 72.5 per cent of Nottinghamshire school leavers in 2004-05 achieving a grade A\*-C at key stage 4. However, 92 per cent of the company's learners have attained key stage 4 or above. PO has around 2.5 per cent learners from black and minority ethnic groups, which matches the local population according to the 2001 census.

### OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

**Grade 3**

4. **The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory.** More specifically, leadership and management, equality of opportunity, quality improvement and business administration and law are satisfactory.

5. **The inspection team was broadly confident in the reliability of the self-assessment process.** All staff are closely involved with the self-assessment process. The general manager sends them all a list of questions to consider, before meeting with each team to collect their views and using these to create a development plan. The process is open and realistically self-critical. The company's most recent self-assessment process identifies appropriate strengths and weaknesses which focus clearly on actions to improve the learners' experience. The company uses data to contribute to judgements. The process follows a clear planning cycle, which includes a quarterly review and update of progress against the development plan. The self-assessment report for 2005-06 is being prepared at the time of inspection. The report for 2004-05 included the views of employers and learners.

## POSITIVE OUTCOMES LIMITED

### 6. The provider has demonstrated that it is in a good position to make improvements.

Since the previous inspection, PO has implemented a carefully considered management restructure, in order to re-align the company in preparation for growth and extending its funding streams. This means that many processes and staff management roles are new, and it is not yet possible to judge their effect on the learners. Success rates have improved over the past three years from significantly below national averages to around the national average, and well-evidenced data shows that success rates have almost doubled in 2005-06. The company has made good progress in rectifying weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report, and those identified in its own development plan.

## KEY CHALLENGES FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES LIMITED:

- implement further strategies to involve employers in training
- continue the drive for learners to achieve within their funded time
- reinforce a wider understanding of equality of opportunity at reviews
- continue to forge productive links between strategic and operational activity

## GRADES

*grade 1 = outstanding, grade 2 = good, grade 3 = satisfactory, grade 4 = inadequate*

Grades awarded at inspection

<b>Leadership and management</b>		<b>3</b>
Contributory grades:		
Equality of opportunity		3
Quality improvement		3

<b>Business administration and law</b>			<b>3</b>
<b>Contributory areas:</b>	<b>Number of learners</b>	<b>Contributory grade</b>	
<b>Administration</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	135	3	
<b>Business management</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	44	3	
NVQ training for young people	25	3	
<b>Customer service</b>			
Apprenticeships for young people	125	3	
NVQ training for young people	5	3	

## ABOUT THE INSPECTION

7. The inspection took place in one visit of four days by three inspectors. Business administration and law was inspected, along with leadership and management. The company also offers programmes in ICT, and retail and commercial enterprise. These areas were not inspected, owing to the small number of learners.

Number of inspectors	3
Number of inspection days	12
Number of learners interviewed	18
Number of staff interviewed	15
Number of employers interviewed	6
Number of locations/sites/learning centres visited	14
Number of visits	1

## **Leadership and Management**

### **Strengths**

- good use of data

### **Weaknesses**

- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity at reviews

## **Business administration and law**

### *Strengths*

- good development of work-related personal skills
- particularly effective short-term action-planning
- good assessment arrangements to match individual learners' needs

### *Weaknesses*

- slow progress of some learners
- insufficient involvement of employers in learners' training

## **WHAT LEARNERS LIKE ABOUT POSITIVE OUTCOMES LIMITED:**

- the approachable, helpful and friendly assessors who really care about learners
- the fact that they enjoy the apprenticeship so much that they are going to do another one
- the chance to get a qualification while working
- having regular contact with PO's staff
- the quick feedback on assessment decisions, with good detail on what is done well

## **WHAT LEARNERS THINK POSITIVE OUTCOMES LIMITED COULD IMPROVE:**

- the amount of staff changes
- access to computers



## DETAILED INSPECTION FINDINGS

### LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

**Grade 3**

#### Strengths

- good use of data

#### Weaknesses

- insufficient reinforcement of equality of opportunity at reviews

8. PO uses data well. Managers collect useful information, and analyse it carefully, especially to help them understand reasons for learners leaving programmes and to identify learners at risk of not progressing. The company has created an innovative way of monitoring learners' progress, so that advisers and learners have up-to-date information on their rate of progression through their programme. They frequently refine the system so that they can understand the story behind the data more clearly and carefully focus improvements to benefit learners. Qualification success rate data for 2005-06 indicates that overall success rates have risen over the past year from significantly below national averages to around the national average. This data has not yet been validated but it is consistent with the company's retention and achievement records.

9. The new management structure of the company is guided by a clear strategic direction to promote growth and limit risk. Directors communicate this to staff through presentations, and involve staff in finding operational solutions to strategic aims. They support the strategy with suggestions for practical and achievable actions, such as appropriate target-setting for new learners, and celebrating success by hand delivering certificates to learners in the presence of their employer, to increase employers' involvement in the learners' success. Financial management is appropriately planned to focus on the needs of learners. The general manager and curriculum managers are now accountable for their own budgets, but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this measure.

10. Communication is satisfactory. The new management structure has created a division between strategic and operational management, with the general manager as an effective link between the two. She holds monthly meetings with departmental managers and with directors which are scheduled to promote a close relationship between strategy and operational activity. However, it is too early to judge whether this will provide a sufficient flow of information. Directors give a yearly update to staff, and also have a monthly newsletter to all staff. PO has reacted promptly to information that staff prefer the newsletter to be discussed with them at meetings, and are re-introducing this method of communication.

11. PO has a satisfactory appraisal system. As well as yearly reviews, all staff have useful monthly individual meetings with their manager, at which issues and development needs are raised. Reviews are thorough, and performance problems recorded, along with actions to resolve issues.

12. Staff development is closely linked to appraisal and review systems. All training staff

have, or are in the process of achieving, learning and development awards. They attend regular standardisation meetings and training on new electronic ways of working. Staff have worked well in partnership with a major employer to improve the relevance of training by matching the NVQ requirements to the employer's own development programme. They are encouraged to take specific external training in health and safety, management, customer service and other relevant qualifications, and PO keeps accurate records of those who are in training and those who have achieved qualifications.

13. Resources are adequate for the needs of the company. The new location provides easy access and the working environment is light and spacious. Learners are well supported to complete online testing for key skills and the technical certificate, either in a small dedicated room at PO's offices, or on assessors' laptop computers in their workplace. The company is very active in encouraging the use of electronic methods of communication and data collection. PO continues to develop innovative e-learning techniques, identified as a strength in the reinspection report. However, not all staff and learners have experience of these techniques. Some of these initiatives are too new for judgements to be made about their effectiveness in supporting learners and assessors.

### **Equality of opportunity**

### **Contributory grade 3**

14. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory overall. PO has a detailed policy for staff, which covers current legislation, and is soon to be updated with the Age Discrimination Act 2006. The policy for learners is shorter, and an updated equalities statement was written last year. All learners are given easily understood notes covering equalities legislation, their rights and responsibilities, and examples of activities which constitute bullying and harassment. This is discussed with them early in their programme to ensure that they understand. They are very clear about who to go to if they have any complaints. PO keeps comprehensive records of complaints, and those which concern equalities and harassment issues are logged separately. Staff take prompt action to resolve all complaints.

15. PO analyses data for learners from minority ethnic groups, and researches the reasons for non-completion of programmes. This analysis does not show significant differences from the data for all learners. Currently, no provision is in place to support learners who speak English as an additional language. No learners have identified specific learning needs or disabilities.

16. Ground-floor rooms in PO's offices are easily accessible to learners and staff with restricted mobility, and the building has toilets appropriately adapted for people with disabilities.

17. All staff who have any contact with learners, including those involved in marketing, have had Criminal Record Bureau checks. The company checks the health and safety and equality arrangements at workplaces before accepting learners for apprenticeships.

18. PO does not reinforce the understanding of equalities issues sufficiently at the learners' progress reviews. Although staff ask questions to check that learners are not treated unfairly, learners are not regularly questioned to ensure that they have an up-to-date understanding of their rights and responsibilities at work, and sufficient knowledge to protect both themselves and others from unfair practices in the workplace. This is significant, as many learners work closely with the public, and many are training for

management positions.

### **Quality improvement**

### **Contributory grade 3**

19. Quality improvement is satisfactory overall. All staff are closely involved with the self-assessment process. The general manager ensures that staff contributions consistently reflect significant issues by providing them all with a list of questions to consider, before meeting with each team to collect their views. The company has successfully created an atmosphere of openness and trust. Views expressed by staff are focused on improvements for learners and the company. The responses are analysed and lead to identification of key issues and development needs. The company's self-assessment report for 2005-06 is being prepared at the time of inspection. The most recent self-assessment report includes the views of learners and employers.

20. The new quality assurance processes that PO was developing at the previous inspection are now established. Managers clearly audit and observe all activities which involve learners, from pre-sign-up activity to leaving. Observation notes show appropriate feedback to the staff. In the new management structure, all managers are currently identifying those aspects of their departmental activity that they need to monitor. However, the company does not monitor policies regularly to ensure that they are current and fit for purpose.

21. PO has few formal minutes of management meetings, but all managers have a brightly coloured book in which they record the actions they agree to at each meeting. The general manager has a similar book in which she keeps the records of all meetings and agreed actions. Outcomes from these actions are then effectively monitored and recorded at the following meeting.

22. PO has made good progress in bringing about improvements identified in the development plan. It has also made improvements against most of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection, especially the monitoring of achievement and assessment practices. Data provided by the employer shows that success rates have improved significantly over the past three years, and are now overall at around the national average. Improvements are strongly focused on improving provision for learners.

## AREAS OF LEARNING

### Business administration and law

### Grade 3

Contributory areas:	Number of learners	Contributory grade
<b>Administration</b> Apprenticeships for young people	135	3
<b>Business management</b> Apprenticeships for young people	44	3
NVQ training for young people	25	3
<b>Customer service</b> Apprenticeships for young people	125	3
NVQ training for young people	5	3

23. PO currently has 338 learners, all of whom are employed. In business administration, 77 are advanced apprentices and 58 are apprentices. Customer service has 65 advanced apprentices and 60 apprentices. Five learners are on an NVQ course at level 2. Management programmes consist of 44 advanced apprentices, 11 learners working towards an NVQ at level 3, nine working towards an NVQ at level 4 and five working towards an NVQ at level 5. The team leader programme consists of three apprentices and one NVQ at level 2 learner. Around 80 per cent of learners are women, and around 5 per cent are from minority ethnic groups. Only just over 20 per cent are aged between 16 and 18. No learners have a declared disability.

24. Learners work in a range of organisations, including hotels, engineering companies, healthcare centres, solicitors, distribution centres and local authorities. They are able to join all programmes at any time of the year and attend an individual induction programme tailored to their needs. The process includes an initial assessment of their literacy, numeracy, language and key skills. Currently, none of the learners are receiving literacy or numeracy support.

25. Learners have the opportunity to attend off-the-job training at the training centre or receive off-the-job training at the workplace. Off-the job training includes support for portfolio-building, key skills development and technical certificate training. Employers carry out on-the-job training. Learners have the opportunity to take short, externally certificated course.

26. Learners are visited regularly by a training adviser from PO, typically every two to four weeks. Learners' progress reviews are completed every 12 weeks with the learner and, where possible, the workplace supervisor. Most learning takes place in the workplace.

#### Strengths

- good development of work-related personal skills
- particularly effective short-term action-planning
- good assessment arrangements to match individual learners' needs

### *Weaknesses*

- slow progress of some learners
- insufficient involvement of employers in learners' training

### **Achievement and standards**

27. Learners develop good work-related personal skills. They quickly settle into their new roles and cope well with new tasks. Learners establish sound working relationships. For example, they effectively develop the personal confidence to deal with requests from colleagues and external customers. They respond well to the demands of a wide range of workplace challenges. Learners apply their personal skills very effectively as team members and independently. Learners' self-esteem is enhanced. Many learners have been given increased responsibility within their job role and many of them apply for higher level training or promotion opportunities. Employers value the learners' good work-related personal skills. This strength was not identified in the company's most recent self-assessment report.

28. Learners make particularly effective use of work-based project activities to provide relevant evidence and their portfolios contain satisfactory work. Some management learners achieve their qualification particularly quickly and progress to higher level professional awards.

29. Success rates, although low, are improving significantly. PO has introduced several measures over the past year designed to increase framework success and timely completion. Although data for 2003-05 shows low success rates, data for 2005-06 shows that the upward trend is continuing, and overall success rates are now around national averages. Unvalidated qualification success rate data, which is consistent with PO's records, shows a significant improvement in success over 2005-06. Timely success rates are also improving. However, while in the two years 2003-05 success rates were at or above national averages for business administration apprentices, customer service advanced apprentices and management and NVQ learners, they were below national averages for business administration advanced apprentices and customer services apprentices. All learners who achieve key skills at an appropriate level have the opportunity to work towards a higher level. The company makes appropriate use of prior achievement to give learners exemptions in key skills.

30. Approximately 10 per cent of current business administration and customer service learners are making slow progress. Learners who have passed their expected completion date are well supported to achieve. PO now targets learners who make slow progress with a range of initiatives to improve the rate of achievement. For example, they have recently introduced an electronic recording process to identify clearly the percentage of the programme learners have completed. The company updates this information and shares it with learners regularly. However, it is too early to make a judgement on the effect of this and other initiatives on overall success rates.

Programme	End Year	Success Rate	No, of learners	Provider NVQ Rate	National NVQ Rate	Provider framework rate	National framework rate
Advanced Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	45	51	46	18	28
		timely	42	38	30	17	18
	2004-05	overall	81	49	47	26	31
		timely	113	27	35	13	23
Apprenticeships	2003-04	overall	30	37	51	30	37
		timely	22	0	25	0	18
	2004-05	overall	49	47	56	29	45
		timely	74	8	35	5	28

For details of how to calculate overall and timely success rates please refer to the "Quality Improvement Pack" (available from the Learning and Skills Council's website: [www.lsc.gov.uk](http://www.lsc.gov.uk)).

### The quality of provision

31. At the previous inspection, short-term action-planning was a strength in business administration. Now all programmes benefit from particularly effective short-term action-planning. Previous action plans are reviewed very effectively and contribute to the completion of subsequent plans. Assessors clearly record detailed time-constrained targets well and ensure that the learners have a good understanding of what is required of them to achieve. Assessors use plans well to monitor the learners' progress. Training advisers are very flexible to meet both the learners' and employers' commercial needs. They schedule visits to ensure that the learner gains maximum benefit from the short-term action-planning process. In customer service action plans, advisers make good use of a cross-referencing guide to help learners identify evidence sources. This strength was recognised in the company's most recent self-assessment report.

32. Assessment practices have improved since the previous inspection. Assessment arrangements are now good and match individual learners' needs well. Learners receive very regular assessment in the workplace. They are usually able to access assessment on demand. Training advisers use a wide range of methods to capture learners' evidence. Many business administration learners use an electronic communication system to submit their work for assessment. Feedback from training advisers is very quick and helpful. The prompt response motivates learners. Assessors share detailed monitoring documents with the learners. Training advisers use these documents very effectively to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. They make good use of e-mail and telephone to discuss progress and give advice and forge good relationships with learners. They are very sensitive to individual needs. For example, a training adviser thoughtfully supported a dyslexic learner with a good range of assessment methods, including professional discussion, photography and questioning techniques that successfully met the learners' needs. Advisers effectively prepare learners for key skills and technical certificate tests and discuss assessment results sensitively and carefully. They plan appropriate individual coaching sessions to provide effective further guidance and support as needed, and enter learners for the tests at times that meet their individual needs. Learners are well motivated by their early achievement of key skills and technical certificates. PO runs a course for young managers. It successfully develops learners' self-confidence in specific



management techniques such as delegation. Learners also learn team working skills through activities such as sailing.

33. Training rooms at the PO's main centre are satisfactory. They are suitably maintained and provide a comfortable environment in which to learn. Well-written learning material is used to support the learners' independent learning. Some learners have access to a suitable range of electronic-based resources. For example, business administration and call centre learners have good access to ICT equipment at their workplace to support their learning. However, for some customer services learners, access is limited. Other equipment and materials in workplaces are at least satisfactory and they are often good.

34. All learners are satisfactorily initially assessed and the results suitably recorded on their individual learning plans. They are referred to appropriate externally supplied additional support for literacy and numeracy if necessary. Currently no learners are receiving support. PO carries out inductions in learners' workplaces, which effectively ensures that learners have a sound awareness of their programme, including health and safety, and rights and responsibilities. PO has limited celebration of learners' success.

35. Employers are not sufficiently involved in learners' training. All learners have appropriate opportunities to carry out the roles and responsibilities that are relevant to their programme in a wide range of good-quality workplaces. However, some employers do not fully understand their role in helping learners to experience roles and responsibilities that develop competence, or how to support learners' progress except by providing witness statements. Often the review only involves the learning adviser and learner, although most employers do sign the review. In some cases where the employer is consulted, the learner does not receive adequate feedback on the employers' views. Some reviews do not include any reference to the employer. On- and off-the-job training is insufficiently linked. Off-the-job training is usually individual and delivered at learners' workplaces by training advisers. However, in many cases no on-the-job training is planned, and where it is planned it is often insufficiently co-ordinated with planned off-the-job training. Some off-the-job training is not planned or recorded in sufficient detail. Although the company assesses learning styles at induction, it does not always use this information effectively to help develop training strategies. Employers usually receive information on the outcome of assessment. This weakness was not highlighted in the company's most recent self-assessment report.

### **Leadership and management**

36. Programme management is satisfactory. New arrangements provide a coherent structure for management of the area, although it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this. Staff are informed about developments through appropriate informal communication. Team meetings are held regularly. Recorded actions are often imprecise and are not time bound. Often, meetings do not include an agenda or standard items for consideration. Regular meetings satisfactorily include consideration of strategies to improve retention and achievement.

37. The company uses data effectively for monitoring and decision-making purposes that drive improvement. Staff are suitably qualified, experienced and occupationally competent. They attend a wide range of relevant staff training events. Annual appraisals are effective in identifying development needs. These are supplemented by effective

monthly review meetings, where personal targets are well monitored.

38. At induction, all learners receive an appropriate introduction to equality and diversity. They have a satisfactory understanding of their rights and responsibilities and feel appropriately protected in the workplace. Learners are confident that the company will resolve any complaints confidentially. However, equality of opportunity is not reinforced during progress reviews effectively. Learning advisers do not fully explore the learners' understanding of relevant issues. For example, reviews are not used effectively to extend the learners' appreciation of the effect of the most recent developments in equality and diversity.

39. The company's arrangements for quality improvement are adequate. Internal verification and assessment practice are satisfactory and all processes are suitably planned. PO maintains appropriately detailed records. Internal verifiers regularly observe all training advisers and provide clearly written time-bound actions for improvement. Opportunities to share good practice are satisfactory. Most learners have an adequate understanding of how to appeal if they do not agree with an assessment decision. Individual learning plans refer to out-of-date PO policies. Learners benefit from changes introduced following their feedback.

40. All staff contributed to the content of the company's most recent self-assessment report. Staff have an adequate understanding of the report's content and how their actions contribute to the achievement of the development plan. The report suitably covers the questions posed in the Common Inspection Framework. The current report, up to April 2005, lacks detailed analysis and evaluation of individual programmes and data is not used sufficiently to support judgements. However, the revised process which is now in use has detailed and honest evaluation of individual programmes and activities. Inspectors agreed with some of the strengths stated in the current report. During inspection, other weaknesses were found that were not sufficiently emphasised, although they have been identified in the report which is now being produced for 2006. The grade awarded at inspection matched that in the self-assessment report.



