

The Laird Foundation

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Background information

Inspection judgements

Inspectors use a four-point scale to summarise their judgements about achievement and standards, the quality of provision, and leadership and management, which includes a grade for equality of opportunity.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Further information can be found on how inspection judgements are made on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Scope of the inspection

In deciding the scope of the inspection, inspectors take account of the provider's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, and comments from the local Learning and Skills Council (LSC) or other funding body. Where appropriate, inspectors also consider the previous inspection report (www.ofsted.gov.uk), reports from the inspectorates' quality monitoring or annual assessment visits, and data on learners and their achievements over the period since the previous inspection.

In addition to reporting on overall effectiveness of the organisation, its capacity to improve further, achievement and standards, quality of provision and leadership and management, this inspection focused on specialist provision in:

- Engineering and manufacturing technologies

Description of the provider

1. The Laird Foundation is based in Birkenhead in Wirral. It was established in 1998 as a charity and a company limited by guarantee. It has a board of trustees with an elected chairman. The Laird Foundation offers training for people in engineering and manufacturing on Merseyside. It specialises in marine engineering training and has its own operational dry dock. It is recognised as a centre of vocational excellence (CoVE) for marine engineering. The company has diversified into more general engineering as the shipbuilding industry declined. It works with 150 companies and has recently merged with an employers' organisation representing more than 800 marine and related companies on Merseyside. A small proportion of The Laird Foundation's training is commercial. Wirral is one of the most deprived districts in the country. The proportion of the population in minority ethnic groups is very low.
2. The Laird Foundation has a contract with Greater Merseyside LSC to provide work-based learning. It has 68 apprentices and 55 advanced apprentices. Basic craft training is carried out in the training centre to develop and assess apprentices' practical skills and key skills. After the initial period of training lasting up to 26 weeks apprentices move into employment, returning to the training centre one day each week to undertake the technical certificate and other requirements of their apprenticeship frameworks. On-the-job training is carried out by their supervisors at work. A team of qualified assessors from The Laird Foundation visit the workplaces regularly to assess the learners and review their progress.
3. The Laird Foundation provides training and assessment for 79 adults through the Train to Gain programme. All training and assessment takes place on employers' premises. Training is at national vocational qualification (NVQ) level 2 and leads to an industry standard qualification. The company offers training to students aged 14-16 from seven local schools, including 48 on a young apprenticeship programme. They attend the training centre and work towards level 1 and level 2 nationally accredited qualifications.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Good: Grade 2
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Good: Grade 2
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3

Sector subject area

Engineering and manufacturing technologies	Good: Grade 2
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Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Good: Grade 2

4. The overall effectiveness of the provision is good and the provision in engineering and manufacturing technologies is good. The standard of engineering skills achieved by learners on all programmes is high. Success rates on advanced apprenticeships and by learners aged 14-16 are good. The success rate in Train to Gain is very good. Apprenticeship success rates for the year 2006-07 are low.
5. The quality of provision is good. The resources at the training centre are very good. Employers provide good on-the-job training. Staff are highly experienced in engineering. A few of the staff are new to classroom and group teaching and are inexperienced in planning and managing sessions.
6. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The provider has managed a period of substantial change effectively. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory and the provider's response to social inclusion is good.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. The Laird Foundation has demonstrated that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Success rates have improved in advanced apprenticeships. Resources and the accommodation at the training centre have expanded. The links with employers have grown and the links with schools have been created. It is too early to tell how the recent merger and the substantial changes in management and staff will influence the capacity of the organisation to improve.
8. Self-assessment is good and leads to effective planning for improvement. The process of self-assessment involves all staff and takes into account a wide range of evidence including the views of learners and employers. The report is largely accurate, correctly identifying most of the strengths and areas for improvement. Inspection findings confirmed most of the self-assessment grades.

Key strengths

- Good success rates for advanced apprenticeships
- Very good overall success rates in Train to Gain

- Learners' high level of practical skills
- Very good engineering resources
- Good on-the-job training
- Good management of change
- Very effective collaborative links with schools and employers

Key areas for improvement

- Low success rates in apprenticeships in 2006-07
- Some insufficient planning of off-the-job training
- Incomplete quality improvement arrangements
- Insufficient promotion of gender equality to employers

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

9. The success rate for advanced apprenticeships in 2006-07 was 75%, which is good and a major improvement on previous years. The success rate in apprenticeships was satisfactory in 2005-06 at 58% but was low in 2006-07 at 47%. In the first year of Train to Gain, all 38 of the learners achieved a qualification. Half of the completing young apprentices transferred to a full apprenticeship programme and a further 20% returned to full-time education. Timely success rates are low. The Laird Foundation supports learners to complete their qualifications and frameworks after the funding has finished. Current apprentices and advanced apprentices are making good progress towards completing their framework on time, supported by closer monitoring of progress by their trainers.
10. Learners develop a high level of practical skills and work to demanding industrial standards, a strength recognised by employers and identified in the self-assessment report. Employers provide a wide range of engineering tasks for learners to practise and develop their skills. Evidence presented in learners' portfolios is of a good standard and covers a diverse range of on- and off-the-job practical work. Some advanced apprentices with the larger employers are trained to use very technically advanced equipment. Learners develop confidence throughout the programme and are given additional responsibility within the workplace. For example, a learner was given responsibility for the removal of a turbo pump from a ship's engine room, its servicing ashore and its subsequent re-installation on the ship. The learner sailed on a channel crossing to monitor the performance of the pump and carry out any additional work required. Young apprentices are given valuable opportunities for additional skill development including computer aided-design and welding.

Quality of provision

Good: Grade 2

11. Learning resources are very good. The training centre is well equipped with computer suites and modern spacious classrooms. Dedicated training rooms are used for specialist areas of engineering such as computer-aided design in which learners write programmes and download them to industry-standard machine tools. The practical workshops are large, with a good range of tools, bench equipment, plant and machines. These are representative of the local industry in which learners work. The welding facilities are extensive and many learners can use the welding workshops simultaneously. Learners regularly work on ships in the provider's operational dry dock for repair and maintenance. Employers provide good work-based resources and learners regularly use high specification industry standard equipment. Health and safety is given the priority necessary in this industry. Young apprentices have a good understanding of health and safety. They have detailed portfolios to record their progress and demonstrate a high standard of skill development.

12. On-the-job training is good and is provided across a wide range of large and small companies in the marine engineering sector and in more general engineering. The Laird Foundation has good working relationships with the employers, a strength recognised in the self-assessment report. Employers understand the need to train their staff and they provide good training and assessment opportunities. The Laird Foundation's trainers communicate effectively with the workplace supervisors and manage assessment well. Employers are generous in allowing learners to have time for training. Staff visit the companies at a frequency dictated by the requirements of the learners and their work schedules. In some cases this is with a frequency well in excess of contractual requirements. In conjunction with employers, trainers have developed a good range of projects and assignments to ensure on-the-job training meets the requirements of the employers and the awarding bodies. The commitment of employers to Train to Gain training is also good.
13. Teaching and training off-the-job at the training centre is not always sufficiently planned. Schemes of work and lesson plans are usually well written and implemented but some fail to differentiate between different learners' needs. Some learners repeat exercises they originally did on a young apprenticeship programme or have done at work. Some practical classes make insufficient use of worksheets and the more able learners are not challenged. The Laird Foundation has had a high turnover of teaching staff and several have recently been appointed. They have appropriate technical and assessor qualifications which are backed by exceptionally good levels of industrial experience. However, they sometimes demonstrate their inexperience of teaching classes and planning the training of groups. They have insufficient knowledge and experience of basic classroom management and teaching techniques. A strategy is in place to ensure all new staff receive instruction in teaching techniques in the first few weeks of appointment but this has not yet been implemented. Some learners experience a delay between the completion of their off-the-job training and being offered a work placement which affects their motivation and commitment. Key skills training is good.
14. Learners enjoy their training. Additional support for learners in literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Support needs are formally identified and followed with well-structured help where appropriate. Apprentices receive an initial interview and assessment tests of their literacy and numeracy abilities. Staff accredit prior learning where appropriate. Induction is satisfactory and includes a good outward bound element. Learners experiencing any personal or family difficulties affecting their work are given very good support by the staff. Staff awareness of drug misuse and child protection has been raised through in-house training sessions. Learners are given good information, advice and guidance about engineering, particularly when they are considering progressing from young apprenticeships to apprenticeships and then again when they progress to advanced apprenticeships.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity**Contributory grade: Satisfactory: Grade 3**

15. The Laird Foundation has been well managed through a period of substantial change. As the self-assessment report identifies, the board gives clear strategic direction. Senior training staff are new to their current roles and six trainers have been recruited. Managers have consulted well with staff to clarify their roles. New procedures for the management of key learning processes have been produced. Development planning is good. The management information system is thorough and is used very well to monitor the progress of individual learners. Staff can quickly access information about learners. Insufficient use is made of the data to analyse key parts of the training for quality improvement, such as the effectiveness of the additional support given to some learners.
16. The Laird Foundation collaborates very effectively with employers and with schools to the benefit of its learners. Well-established links with local schools have led to good opportunities for 14-16 year-old learners to gain a level 2 qualification and then progress to engineering apprenticeships. Leadership and management of young apprenticeships are good. The apprenticeship programmes are supported by very good management of the relationships with a wide range of employers. The management of Train to Gain is good. The company carries out training needs analyses and provides training directly or through subcontractors to develop employees' skills. Subcontractors are well managed.
17. Other aspects of management are satisfactory, including the health and safety arrangements and the management of resources. Changes in the management structure have delayed the current round of staff performance reviews but the operations manager has held interim individual discussions with training staff to discuss their performance and their professional development needs. The Laird Foundation makes an important contribution to the local community and to the economic well-being of Wirral.
18. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. The Laird Foundation meets the needs of learners from a wide range of backgrounds. The apprenticeship programme effectively targets learners from deprived areas in the Wirral. Students from a local special school take part in the 14-16 programme. The company has improved its promotion of equality of opportunity to learners, an area for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. Reinforcement of learners' understanding of equality of opportunity takes place at their progress review meetings. School students receive a comprehensive induction including detailed information for safe working practices and equal opportunities. The equal opportunities action plan has been updated although the equal opportunities policy is out of date. Staff are insufficiently aware about how to promote equality of opportunity with employers, particularly to address the very low participation by women in the apprenticeship programme. The Laird Foundation has been successful in attracting women onto the programmes for school students and has been active in promoting engineering as a career for women to local schools.
19. Quality improvement arrangements are satisfactory on the whole but some of the arrangements are incomplete. Comprehensive procedures are in place covering the key aspects of the training. Internal audits have been effectively used to bring about improvement. Improvements have been made, for example to some success rates, in monitoring and managing learners' progress and in the management of on-the-job training and assessment. Internal verification is satisfactory. The Laird Foundation

collects feedback at a learners' forum every three months and from an annual survey of learners. The feedback is analysed but does not yield sufficient information to improve the training. Observations of teaching have been carried out for the previous two years and have clearly identified actions for improvement for individual trainers. They have not been moderated or used systematically to drive improvement in off-the-job training. Self-assessment is good and leads to effective planning for improvement.

What learners like:

- The outward bound course at induction
- The helpful, friendly tutors
- The targets they are given at progress review meetings
- The convenient location of the training centre
- Being found a job
- The variety of the training

What learners think could improve:

- The early start time
- 'Too many changes in staff'
- When there is a gap between completing their initial training and entering employment
- The size of the lockers
- Some poorly functioning lathes

Annex

Learners' achievements

Success rates on **work-based learning apprenticeship programmes** managed by the provider 2005 to 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate **	National NVQ rate**	Provider framework rate**	National framework rate**
Advanced Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	68	21%	56%	19%	47%
		timely	71	11%	33%	10%	26%
	05-06	overall	10	30%	55%	30%	49%
		timely	17	0%	34%	0%	30%
	06-07	overall	16	75%	N/a	75%	N/a
		timely	15	13%	N/a	7%	N/a
Apprenticeships	04-05	overall	47	40%	52%	38%	42%
		timely	46	13%	26%	9%	19%
	05-06	overall	59	69%	57%	58%	51%
		timely	65	43%	37%	20%	32%
	06-07	overall	59	54%	N/a	47%	N/a
		timely	61	16%	N/a	13%	N/a

Note 'At the time of the inspection - LSC data for 2006-07 had yet to be fully validated and national rates are not available'

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider and national qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

Success rates on **work-based learning Train to Gain programmes** managed by the provider 2007

Programme	End Year	Success rate	No. of learners*	Provider NVQ rate**
Train to Gain ***	2006-07	overall	38	100%
		timely	38	74%

Note: 2007-08 data is available for less than three months and is not included.

* Learners who leave later than originally planned are counted in the year they actually leave. This group of learners are then added to the learners who planned to complete in a given year and did so or left earlier than planned

** Provider qualification success rates are calculated using LSC published data derived from the 'Individual Learning Record'

*** Includes 'Train to Gain' long course NVQ provision, but not 'skills for life'