

Learning Concepts Ltd

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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:

- Information and communication technology for users
- Literacy and numeracy

Description of the provider

1. Learning Concepts Ltd delivers **learndirect** programmes in one centre through the North East **learndirect** region. It does not currently deliver any other government funded provision. Located in Sunderland city centre within a Grade 2 listed building close to a jobcentre, it has three training rooms equipped with a total of 17 computers. The centre is open every weekday from 9.00 until 17.00. It provides literacy and numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) for users programmes. Learners study at home with the support of virtual tutors or in the centre. At the time of inspection it had 109 learners, including 43 remote learners. Currently 43 learners are following literacy courses, 27 are enrolled on numeracy courses and 39 are taking ICT courses. Learning Concepts Ltd employs eight staff, four of whom are full-time. These include a centre manager, who is also one of the two directors of the company, an administrator, a business development manager, two tutors and two learner support staff. The centre has not been directly inspected previously.
2. Sunderland, including Washington and Houghton le Spring, has an unemployment rate of 5.6% compared with 2.9% nationally. It is 15th from the bottom in the list of the 354 local authority districts ranked according to their overall level of deprivation.

Summary of grades awarded

Effectiveness of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Capacity to improve	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Achievement and standards	Good: Grade 2
Quality of provision	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

Sector subject area

Information and communication technology for users	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Literacy and numeracy	Satisfactory: Grade 3

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Leadership and management, ICT for users, and literacy and numeracy are satisfactory. Equality of opportunity is inadequate.

Capacity to improve

Satisfactory: Grade 3

4. Learning Concepts Ltd has demonstrated sufficient capacity to improve. It has made good use of its first self-assessment report to plan, implement and monitor the successful development of **learnirect** provision in the centre. It has improved its quality improvement procedures through the use of teaching observations, attracted new learners and achieved success rates significantly above the national and regional averages.
5. Self-assessment is generally satisfactory. The self-assessment report was partially accurate in its assessment of strengths and areas for improvement, mostly accurate in the grades awarded, and has been used effectively to plan and implement action for improvement.

Key strengths

- Good achievement in literacy and numeracy
- Very good tutor support
- Good inclusive learning environment
- Good planning for development of the provision

Key areas for improvement

- Insufficiently systematic reviewing process
- Too little use of learner feedback to bring about improvement
- Weak implementation of equal opportunities policy

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Good: Grade 2

6. Achievement and standards are good overall. Success rates for literacy and numeracy are good, and significantly above regional and national averages for all learners. For literacy and numeracy learners, which form most centre enrolments, the success rate is 83%, compared with the regional rate of 69% and the national rate of 72%. For ICT, the success rate is 66%, well above the regional average of 46%, and the national average of 49%. Learners are improving their employability through gaining qualifications. Their confidence grows to continue their learning as they successfully complete short courses contributing towards qualifications. They work steadily both at the centre and at home, and few withdraw from their courses before completion.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

7. Tutors support ICT and literacy and numeracy learners very well, motivating them to pursue their programmes and successfully achieve qualifications. They are very flexible and available to help learners at any time while the centre is open. Those who have been unemployed or out of learning for some time particularly value the tutors' encouragement, patience and understanding. Many said how much their self-confidence and self-esteem has risen during the time they have been attending the learning centre. However, systematic advice and guidance on progress is not always offered and learners seldom use the virtual support available from on-line course tutors.
8. Learning Concepts Ltd promotes a very positive and inclusive learning environment for all learners. The centre provides a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere where learners feel welcome, and many attend up to three times per week. There is no booking system and learners are always able to access the IT facilities. Tea and coffee are readily available. A new training room has recently been refurbished downstairs to cope with increased centre attendance. Learners with a disability who attend the centre are always given priority access to laptops on the ground floor.
9. Tutors' assessment of learners' work is satisfactory. They make clear to learners what they have and have not done correctly. Computer-based assessments are carried out appropriately. On-line tutors make helpful recommendations for progression to new courses. However, communication with learners is seldom two-way.
10. The range of programmes is satisfactory, meeting the needs of local people wanting to improve their skills and gain qualifications in a supportive and informal setting. The centre makes suitable arrangements through initial assessment to ensure that learners follow a programme suited to their skill levels and interests. The centre forwards the outcomes of initial assessment to the virtual course tutor who determines the appropriate level and type of programme. All new learners have an induction to the centre, to **learnirect** programmes, and to various policies and procedures such as health and safety and equal opportunities. However, learner recall of these aspects of induction is poor. The centre offers home-based inductions for remote learners unable to visit the centre.

11. Advice and guidance given to learners is satisfactory to meet their immediate needs. The centre refers learners whose needs cannot be met by the centre, including for example, some speakers of other languages, to other providers. However, wider discussions about future careers or further courses are not routinely included in learning reviews or available to all learners.
12. The review of learner progress is insufficient and unsystematic. Learners are not always aware of their learning objectives for learning sessions. Tutors prepare learning plans but do not routinely discuss them with learners or give them a written copy. There are few clear targets set to measure learners' progress, and tutors do not always identify actions that learners need to take before the next session. Tutors make too few attempts to identify the way learners prefer to learn. Tutors do not routinely set and evaluate progress against longer term targets for learning. Learning is not regularly reinforced and too little use is made of additional learning resources to support **learnirect** courses.

Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Inadequate: Grade 4

13. The centre has planned well to develop its provision, steadily increasing learner numbers and meeting its regional targets for completion of national literacy and numeracy tests. It has made effective use of the development plan arising from self-assessment to support this. Access to training rooms has increased to accommodate the growth in the number of learners. The number of staff has also increased since the centre opened. This allows more flexibility over staff cover, and addresses a weakness identified in the self-assessment report. There are good arrangements to monitor staff performance through appraisal, to set targets for improvement, and to support staff in achieving these. The centre has made good progress towards improving the training qualifications of staff. This too was identified in the self-assessment report as a weakness. The centre has improved its quality assurance arrangements through the introduction of a formal system of teaching observations, supplemented by informal peer observations. The introduction of observations has increased staff confidence, encouraged a culture of improvement, and is beginning to make a difference to the quality of delivery.
14. Other improvements are planned. For example, the centre has begun to collect information about learner progression, and has made a commitment to gain national recognition for its advice and guidance services.
15. Learning Concepts Ltd has a satisfactory range of key policies and procedures, including health and safety, complaints and a skills for life strategy. Communication within the centre is good.
16. The centre works effectively with other agencies to recruit learners from disadvantaged groups. These include the local jobcentre, and organisations supporting people with disabilities, long-term ill-health and social problems such as drug and alcohol misuse. The centre is in a listed building that has not been adapted for people with disabilities. However, two nearby **learnirect** centres offering similar provision are located in

accessible accommodation. The centre has an equal opportunities policy and draws the attention of new staff and learners to this during induction.

17. The equal opportunities policy clearly identifies the principles that inform its approach to equality of opportunity. However, there is no written plan and few strategies in place to ensure that the policy is implemented. For example, staff have not received any training to raise their awareness of legislation, or of how approaches to training might take account of specific learning needs or disability. The induction process does not do enough to make learners aware of the relevance of the policy to them and to their learning. The centre has made little use of quantitative data on disability, gender or age to analyse the recruitment and achievement of different groups, or to inform planning. The provision of adaptive technology, such as large screen monitors or tracker-ball mice for learners with disabilities is insufficient.
18. The centre's quality improvement arrangements do not make sufficient use of learner views to bring about improvement. The arrangements place too much reliance on the outcomes of a standardised quarterly online survey and a brief end-of-course questionnaire introduced by the centre. Although the last two quarterly learner satisfaction surveys show a high level of satisfaction, the response rates of 30% and 36% are too low to give the centre valid information about the quality of experience for most learners. The supplementary end of course questionnaire provides too little qualitative information to help the centre plan improvement in the quality of the learning experience. The centre recognises the limitations of the end-of-course survey, and is looking at alternative ways of seeking learner views.
19. Self-assessment is broadly satisfactory. The last report was drafted by the centre manager after consultation with the two members of staff then in post. It accurately identified some strengths and areas for improvement but missed others. Inspection findings confirmed most of the grades awarded in the self-assessment report. The report has been used effectively to plan and implement action for improvement.

What learners like:

- Nice atmosphere in the centre
- Pleasant support from tutors who are always on hand
- 'I enjoy being on the computer'
- 'Being able to pass my exam'
- 'I enjoy learning at my own pace'

What learners think could improve:

- 'More computers and bigger rooms'
- 'More advice on other options'
- 'Make it clear what I have to do next'
- 'Regularly reinforce safe computer work as I do too much sitting'
- 'Give me more feedback on my programme'
- 'Opportunity to do my national vocational qualification (NVQ)'

Sector Subject areas

Information and communication technology for users

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Strengths

- Good tutor support
- Good inclusive learning environment

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently systematic reviewing process

Literacy and numeracy

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Strengths

- Good achievement in literacy and numeracy
- Good tutor support
- Good inclusive learning environment

Areas for improvement

- Insufficiently systematic reviewing process

Annex

Learners' achievements

Q3: 2007	Enrolments	Counted for data	Success rate (%)	Withdrawal rate (%)
All sectors	928	775	82	3
ICT	94	50	66	8
Literacy and numeracy	834	725	83	3

Equality and diversity

Q3: 2007	All Ethnic Groups	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese/Other	Mixed	Not Known	White
Enrolments	928	6	25	10	21	1	865
Completion rate (%)	97	100	100	100	100	0	97
Achievement rate (%)	81	100	75	75	100	0	80
Success rate (%)	82	100	72	60	100	0	82
Withdrawal rate (%)	3	0	0	0	0	100	3