

Sencia Limited

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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' monitoring 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:

- Employability training

Description of the provider

1. Sencia Ltd (Sencia) is a national organisation based in Leicester specialising in employability training. It contracts with London East LSC to provide employability skills programmes (ESP) in Haringey, Walthamstow, Ilford, Barking, Romford, Upton Park and Stratford.
2. An area manager and quality manager are responsible for the provision overall. Five staff manage day-to-day operations. Curriculum managers and a skills for life co-ordinator oversee the development of courses and staff. Two employment liaison officers and an employment adviser provide advice, guidance and employability training.
3. At the time of inspection 205 learners followed ESP programmes of between 12 and 15 weeks duration. Programmes offer training in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) and/or literacy and/or numeracy. All learners receive employability skills training. Those at entry level 3 and above work towards accreditation in this area. All learners are in receipt of state benefits.
4. Training centres are located in London boroughs with high indices of deprivation. Newham's employment rate is 57.4% compared with 69.3% for London as a whole and a national average of 74.3%, while unemployment is more than twice the national average at 12.2%. In Barking, Newham and Haringey over 20% of people of working age are claiming a key benefit compared with a London average of 15%.
5. Sencia provides an extensive range of employability programmes nationally funded through the Department for Work and Pensions. This represents most of its provision. It was not part of the scope of this inspection.

Summary of grades awarded

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

Sector subject area

| | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Employability training | Satisfactory: Grade 3 |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|

Overall judgement

Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. The overall effectiveness of the provision is satisfactory. Leadership and management are good as is capacity to improve and equality of opportunity. Achievement and standards and the quality of provision are satisfactory.

Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

7. Sencia has demonstrated a good capacity to improve. Its strong strategic vision to meet community needs has effectively supported very rapid development of the ESP programme. New centres have been quickly acquired and resourced while maintaining and improving quality assurance. Quality assurance is thorough. The self-assessment process is accurate, open and inclusive. Data is used very effectively to analyse performance. Changes to the company structure have enhanced its capacity to deliver the programme during rapid expansion. The company supports staff well to improve their specialist skills and qualifications. Learners' achievements in ESOL and literacy are satisfactory. Job outcomes are improving but remain low. Sharing of good practice to improve teaching and learning is insufficient. Despite recent improvements target-setting in reviews of learners' progress remains weak.

Key strengths

- Good development of English language skills
- Thorough and comprehensive initial assessment process
- Good personal support for learners
- Strong strategic vision to meet community needs
- Very effective development of the programme
- Good arrangements for quality assurance and performance management

Key areas for improvement

- Low job outcomes
- Weak target-setting in learner reviews
- Insufficient employment-related content in English and numeracy lessons
- Insufficient promotion of the understanding of equality of opportunity
- Insufficient sharing of good practice to improve teaching and learning
- Some poor learning resources

Main findings

Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

8. Achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. Learners' development of English speaking, listening, reading and writing skills is good. They significantly improve their confidence and self-esteem.
9. Success rates in ESOL and literacy accreditation are satisfactory. At entry level 1 and 2, which constitutes most of the provision, ESOL success rates are around 60%. All 80 learners entered for an employability award have completed their portfolios of evidence and await awarding body confirmation of achievement. Attainment in numeracy sessions is satisfactory, but success rates are low. Punctuality is good and attendance rates are satisfactory. At one centre, progression into further education is good.
10. Job outcomes are low. Few learners gain jobs, an area for improvement identified in the self-assessment report. For most learners, improvement of their English language skills towards a level where employment is sustainable is the most important goal. Nevertheless Sencia has identified the need to increase the rate at which learners enter employment. The proportion gaining jobs has risen steadily since the programme started from an initial 6% to 14% in recent months.

Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

11. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Initial assessment is thorough and comprehensive. All learners have detailed individual learning plans clearly recording information from initial and diagnostic activities for ESOL literacy, and numeracy. Learners have a good understanding of their own learning styles and appropriate ways of learning. Employability assessments are well completed and recorded to help identify needs and barriers to learning. Staff use assessment results effectively to ensure that learners are placed on suitable courses, and to fully involve learners in planning their programmes.
12. Tutors use an appropriate range of teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of individual learners. Lesson plans are detailed, and designed effectively to meet learners' mixed attainment levels, and the demands of continuous enrolment. Teaching staff take care to involve all learners in group discussions, and employ a good range of teaching styles. Group sizes are small, with a maximum of 12 learners. Learners receive good individual attention, and quickly become confident participants. However, in weaker sessions tutors do not provide sufficient challenge to the most able. Sencia identified teaching and learning as good in its self-assessment report.
13. In progress reviews, target-setting is weak and not rigorous across the provision. Although detailed information is collected at the start of learners' programmes on employability needs, the information is not used to set effective targets to help learners progress into employment. ESOL literacy and numeracy targets are often generic, are not sufficiently specific and do not have completion dates. Personal and social targets, particularly to improve confidence and motivation, are not agreed and set with learners. They do not

focus on barriers to employment identified at the beginning of the course. Few specific targets are set to improve attendance or other employability skills.

14. The extent to which programmes meet the needs and interests of learners is satisfactory. Centres are located close to the jobcentres which refer learners to the programme. Good collaborative work with jobcentres, community groups and effective negotiation with other providers ensures that local people have good coverage without duplication. Intensive 12 week programmes offer ESOL, literacy and numeracy learning at five levels. All learners attend a weekly 'employability day' with a strong focus on work, successfully integrating numeracy and literacy development into the content.
15. English language, literacy and numeracy learning lack sufficient employment related content. In most sessions ESOL, literacy and numeracy are taught separately from employability. The content of English and numeracy sessions does not make sufficient reference to employment. Working environments are not routinely used as a context in which to set learning. Sencia partially identified this in its self-assessment report and schemes of work have been amended to contain some job-related references.
16. Guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Learners receive good personal support. Staff show a good understanding of their personal circumstances. Additional support is provided to help learners maintain their motivation and attendance. Timely and effective support is offered on a wide range of personal issues. Staff routinely intervene to help learners, for instance assisting them with letters to utility companies or landlords and contacting local housing associations and voluntary organisations on their behalf. Referrals to advice centres and external agencies are regular. Help with financial difficulties is provided.
17. Staff provide learners with satisfactory information, advice and guidance. In all centres, notice boards display the latest job opportunities, and are kept up to date. One of the eight centres has particularly good links with the local college of further education, and a specialist college adviser visits frequently and regularly. Twenty-four learners have now progressed to courses at that college. Sencia provides good information on alternative provision if the programme is unsuitable for a referred candidate. Induction is organised appropriately and is satisfactory.

Leadership and management

Good: Grade 2

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

18. Leadership and management are good. Senior management of the national company use their expertise effectively to support local staff. Recruitment processes are rigorous. The company has a strong commitment to promoting inclusion and uses its regional contacts well to implement it.

19. Sencia has developed the programme very effectively. It has quickly acquired and resourced new centres while maintaining and improving quality assurance. Changes to the company structure have enhanced its capacity to deliver the programme during a period of rapid expansion. A very carefully planned approach to this expansion ensures each new centre has a core of expert staff to support new tutors and learners effectively. Communication within the company is good. Regular meetings are minuted. Actions identified are routinely followed up. Information is shared appropriately both through meetings and a well managed intranet.
20. Quality assurance arrangements are very thorough. They complement a very effective performance management structure. Well-documented audit procedures are recorded centrally on the intranet, providing managers ready access. London area staff work well with partners within the national company. Two regional quality managers work well to ensure consistency of approach and standardised judgements. Audits and direct observations of all processes are enhanced by thorough consultation with learners. Sencia uses data very effectively to analyse performance. Managers revise development plans and set new targets monthly which are clear and well understood across the organisation. Data contribute effectively to the inclusive and accurate self-assessment process. The intranet is particularly well used to consult anonymously with staff when preparing the report.
21. Highly effective internal verification and moderation procedures are in place across the provision. Detailed procedures outline the delivery of all awards with clear responsibilities, induction for learners, testing procedures and internal sampling strategies. Quarterly standardisation meetings are well attended. Staff also benefit from a standardised approach to assessments. Effective feedback from the internal verifier enables staff to improve the quality of assessments and all actions are monitored to improve the provision. The procedures are particularly useful in view of the large increase in the range of qualifications in literacy, language and numeracy that learners have achieved since the start of the contract.
22. Arrangements to meet government requirements on safeguarding are satisfactory. Sencia has appropriately vetted all staff. However, it has no formal procedures or policies on safeguarding.
23. Some learning resources are poor. Sencia routinely invests in good quality premises and equipment. However, some rooms are cramped and in others traffic noise disrupts learning. Sencia recognises the problem of overcrowding and has well advanced plans to open a new centre to replace the most cramped accommodation. Although some learning materials are well prepared and used, others contain spelling or typographical errors, lack clarity, or are uninspiring with few images to break up text. Some use complex language unsuitable for most learners.
24. The sharing of good practice to improve teaching and learning is insufficient. While inspectors observed some good aspects in lessons, too little was inspiring. Staff in each centre meet regularly with the quality and curriculum managers, but seldom across centres to share expertise. Managers and staff have insufficient awareness of good practice nationally in literacy, numeracy and employability training.
25. Equality of opportunity is good. Sencia's strong vision focuses well on meeting community needs. It has significantly increased access to employability training for low skilled adults in areas with high levels of deprivation. Data is used very effectively to plan and monitor outreach activity and its impact. Monthly management meetings routinely

compare the performance of different groups of learners. Strategies to help underperforming groups are beginning to have an impact. Newly appointed employment liaison officers have good local knowledge to support particular groups in the centres. Job outcomes have risen. The ethnic profile of Sencia staff reflects that of its learners. Learners and staff treat each other with respect. Programmes are managed flexibly to accommodate learners' personal circumstances and learning needs. Centres are welcoming and safe.

26. Policies on equality of opportunity are satisfactory and promoted well during induction. Induction is welcoming and inclusive. Staff use visual aids effectively to help learners to understand about stereotyping and discrimination. Nearly all centres are fully accessible to those with limited mobility and arrangements are in place to allow access in others.
27. Promotion of the understanding of equality of opportunity amongst staff and learners is insufficient. Equality and diversity have only recently been included as a standard item in centre meeting agendas. Minutes rarely record discussion on the topic. Staff have received no recent training in diversity. Equality and diversity are insufficiently reinforced and promoted during reviews. Sencia does not systematically monitor data on learners' disability.

What learners like:

- Friendly helpful staff – ‘they’re like family!’
- ‘I’ve learnt a lot of English’
- ‘I thought I didn’t have any brains – now I know I can learn’
- ‘Numeracy gets your brain working’
- ‘I’m not made to look silly in front of other people’
- ‘There’s never any arguments – everyone gets on so well’

What learners think could improve:

- Classroom temperature – too hot in summer
- ‘Overcrowding and too much noise’
- Amount of teaching about workplaces – currently insufficient
- ‘It’s sometimes difficult in a group with lots of different levels’