

# Azure Charitable Enterprises

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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](http://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](http://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. Azure Charitable Enterprises (Azure) is a registered charity. It provides supported employment experience and opportunities, for people with disabilities or those who are disadvantaged, in the company's garden centre, landscaping and printing businesses. Azure has headquarters in Cramlington, Northumberland, and has provided services in the northeast since 1986. A team of 15 staff, managed by a senior and deputy manager are responsible for the delivery of provision that includes training and supportive work-placement. They report to Azure's board of non-executive directors.
2. Azure holds a Department for Work and Pensions contract for Workstep provision and until September 2007 provided Entry to Employment (E2E) training as a subcontractor for a large regional provider. In August 2007, it contracted directly with the Northumbrian LSC to offer E2E to 12 learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Azure offers training in retailing and horticulture, Skills for Life and employability skills. Learners receive on- and off-the-job training in areas including communication skills, team building, living skills, budgeting, preparation of curriculum vitae and jobsearch activities. Azure offers learners additional qualifications in topics such as emergency first aid, manual handling, health and safety, food safety and food hygiene, retailing, horticulture and adult literacy and numeracy. Currently seven learners are on the E2E programme, of whom four are training in horticulture and three in retailing.

## 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	Satisfactory: Grade 3
Equality of opportunity	Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

## Sector subject area

Employability training	Satisfactory: Grade 3
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## Overall judgement

### Effectiveness of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

3. Azure's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. The E2E provision is very new and although the contract started in August 2007, learners did not join the programme until December of that year. Achievement and standards are satisfactory. Progression rates are low but improving. Learners achieve a good range of additional qualifications and develop good employability skills. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Tutors make good use of learning resources and learners benefit from high levels of support from all staff. However, they pay insufficient attention to planning individual learning programmes and monitoring the progress of individual learners. Leadership and management are satisfactory and equality of opportunity is good. Good strategies to establish the programme have been maintained through the continued development of resources and programme documentation. However, quality assurance processes are not yet established and are not instrumental in supporting improvements.

### Capacity to improve

Good: Grade 2

4. Azure has a good capacity to improve. After a disappointing progression rate in 2007/08, early indications in 2008/09 are that improvement actions have been successful and the progression rate is improving. The extensive promotion of Azure's values and specialist support has ensured that referral agencies have a better understanding of the learners who will benefit most from Azure's provision. The programme has benefited from an ethos of continual development that is effectively focused on learning. Significant improvements have been achieved through staffs' informal and continual appraisal of documentation and programme content. Communication is good within the small, motivated staff team. The team has developed many new resources and training materials through well structured working groups. However, arrangements to evaluate the quality of key learning processes are insufficiently thorough and Azure has no formal process for gathering learners' views. Azure's recognition of the lack of quality assurance has led to the formation of a quality improvement group and the development of a suite of adequately detailed quality assurance policies and procedures. However, these are not yet fully established and it is too soon to assess their effectiveness.
5. Self-assessment involves all staff and is broadly satisfactory. The self-assessment report reflects the E2E provision in the very early stages of the programme's launch. The report provides textual judgements for the E2E provision. However, grades and significant judgements are shared with Azure's larger Workstep provision and few relate to the E2E programme. Aspects of the report are too descriptive and some evidence to support judgements is insufficiently detailed or quantifiable. Azure has changed its self-assessment arrangements for 2009/10 to establish a specific report for the E2E programme.

## Key strengths:

- Good development of employability skills
- Good use of teaching and learning resources
- Good support for learners
- Good strategies to establish provision and build capacity
- Well informed and involved staff team

## Key areas for improvement:

- Low progression rates
- Inadequate planning of individual learning
- Insufficiently established quality improvement processes

## Main findings

### Achievement and standards

Satisfactory: Grade 3

6. Achievement and standards are satisfactory, as identified in the self-assessment report. Learners develop good employability skills while on programme. Good emphasis is placed on the development of their vocational skills during practical and related theory sessions. Tutors and work-placement supervisors at Azure's commercial garden centre are effective in developing learners' timekeeping, attendance and vocational skills in topics such as customer care, stocktaking and shelf-filling. They plan appropriate and meaningful tasks which enable learners to consolidate their practical and theoretical learning. Learners increase their confidence, skills and team working and they become more reliable while on the programme. The programme includes literacy and numeracy support, but Azure does not measure or formally monitor the progress learners make as a result of the support they receive.
7. Achievement for those learners entered for qualifications is very good at 100%. Since August 2007, a total of 32 qualifications in topics such as manual handling, health and safety, and food hygiene have been awarded. Of the learners working towards qualifications in horticulture, 41% have achieved a full level 1 award and a further 24% have achieved units towards the qualification. In retailing, 33% of learners achieved the level 1 award and a further 50% achieved units towards the award.
8. Progression rates into further education, training or employment are low. In 2007/08, the rate was 33%. However, early indications are that the progression rate has improved and is currently 50%. Azure is awaiting validation for four learners who have recently left the programme to take up further training.

### Quality of provision

Satisfactory: Grade 3

9. The quality of provision is satisfactory. Azure overgraded this aspect in the self-assessment report. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. A well organised, comprehensive range of practical and theory resources supports the development of learners' skills. Training sessions are organised well. Tutors make good use of resources from the training shop to develop learners' numeracy skills. They make effective use of clear diagrams to meet the individual needs of learners. Training plans in horticulture accommodate adverse weather conditions and tutors effectively plan activities to allow periods of quiet reflection for learners. Teaching environments within the practical areas are clean and tidy and learners are prompted to incorporate good housekeeping and health and safety into the completion of tasks. All learners are actively involved in their vocational and employability training and enjoy the sessions. Learners benefit from the additional support of vocationally experienced training assistants. The roles of tutors and training assistants are clear and each is effective in complementing the work of



the other. The ratio of staff to learners is good and provides good levels of additional support. Tutor qualifications are appropriate and relevant to their role. Some vocational training sessions have prepared lesson plans; in other cases, tutors complete them on the training day.

10. Arrangements to identify and support learners' literacy and numeracy needs are satisfactory. All learners complete initial diagnostic assessments at the start of the programme. Learners' programmes include discrete literacy and numeracy teaching and some lesson plans are matched to the literacy and numeracy core curricula. Tutors make good use of teaching assistants to provide additional support that is integrated with vocational and employability training. However, diagnostic assessments are not used to help develop individual learning objectives for learners. Insufficient attention is paid to reviewing learners' progress in literacy and numeracy.
11. The formal recording of plans to meet learners' individual development needs is inadequate. Informally, staff plan individual learning but do not record any of the discussion, resulting targets or actions to be taken to support learners' development. Learners have no record of individual learning plans or target dates for completion of E2E key objectives. Learners' initial assessment outcomes or personal development needs are not always formally included when planning learning, work-placement activities or external visits. Learners complete their passports retrospectively and give insufficient consideration to forward planning. Azure has identified the need to record learning objectives more thoroughly and is in the early stages of introducing individual learning plans.
12. Programmes and activities meet learners' needs satisfactorily. Azure provides specialist supportive training and work experience for learners who would otherwise have to travel long distances. It has established strict codes of conduct to support and safeguard the vulnerable clients and learners who use the training centre. External visits are planned well and meet learners' personal and social needs effectively.
13. Learners receive extensive and good support at all stages of their training. Staff plan initial meetings outside the training centre for those learners who are too apprehensive to enter the building. Induction staff investigate factors that may affect learners' ability to succeed. Staff have good relationships with external agencies, parents and carers that are used effectively to meet learners' welfare needs. Formal and informal support is an integral part of the training programme with supervised activities planned appropriately to match learners' needs. Azure provides learners with free food, including a choice of lunch, while they are on the programme. Arrangements to provide learners with information, advice and guidance are good. Exit reviews take good account of learners' domestic, housing, financial and external agency support arrangements. Staff take effective action to involve learners' families and professional support workers in progression planning for learners. Many learners maintain contact with Azure after they have left the programme.

## Leadership and management

Satisfactory: Grade 3

Equality of opportunity

Contributory grade: Good: Grade 2

14. Leadership and management are satisfactory. This does not match Azure's assessment. Azure has very effectively built on experience gained from its existing DWP Workstep provision to establish the E2E programme. Azure has a clear rationale in establishing an E2E programme to make good use of the specialist staff team. Managers have consolidated and developed the team effectively to meet the needs of E2E learners more fully. Staff have been very effective in sharing their specific expertise and establishing good relationships with all referral agencies. After initial uncertainties, referral agencies now have a clear understanding of which learners' will most benefit from attending Azure. Financial management is good and focused sufficiently on learning and learning resources.
15. The experienced staff team has a wide range of suitable qualifications and all staff are completing additional training and development. All training staff have a teaching qualification, one staff member has a Skills for Life qualification at level 4, one a qualification at level 4 in information, advice and guidance and another is working towards a qualification at level 3 in information, advice and guidance. All staff have a qualification at level 3 in equality of opportunity. Attendance on external training is good and senior staff attend a wide range of regional meetings. The induction of new staff is planned effectively and suitably supportive. Communication is good. The informal sharing of information between staff is good and further supported by a detailed staff handbook and interesting newsletter. A newly recruited communication officer maintains good links with referral agencies channelling appropriate information to relevant staff. Senior management and staff team meetings are appropriately scheduled and are effective in sharing information with staff, although few discussions generate any developmental actions. However, all staff take part in working groups which are productive and involve staff in developing policy, protocol and refining practice. Individual staff meetings with line managers are held three times each year and enable staff to raise concerns.
16. Health and safety practices are satisfactory. Azure is completing a thorough audit of all health and safety policies and practices following consultation with the LSC. Azure provides supervised work-placements and risk assessments are in place for all activities. Azure's procedures meet current government requirements for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. It keeps a central register of enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks for all staff. It has a well established code of conduct for working with young people and vulnerable adults. However, Azure has not yet developed a safeguarding policy. Arrangements to identify and support learners' literacy and numeracy needs are adequate. However, Azure has yet to develop a Skills for Life policy and the progress made by learners during their programme is not formally monitored.
17. The quality assurance of key learning processes is insufficiently well established. Azure does not currently monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Staff

targets are agreed during their annual appraisal but too few of these are aimed at improving the learners' experience or programme performance. Learners are encouraged to comment on their experience during progress reviews. However, no formal process is in place for capturing these views and little evidence exists of specific actions taken in response to learners' comments. Azure has recently developed a comprehensive suite of quality assurance policies and procedures. The phased introduction of these policies is in its initial stages.

18. Equality of opportunity is good as identified in the self-assessment report. Azure's actions to support learners with specific challenges are effective in promoting equality of opportunity. Many learners have been disengaged from education and training for some considerable time. Phased introduction to the programme, meetings with external care agencies and parents, and extended taster days are used to encourage prospective learners to participate. Azure's complex equality of opportunity policy is summarised as learner guidance on mutual respect and the behaviour that is expected of them while on the programme. Respect for others is a recurring theme throughout the programme. Learners develop a good team spirit. They recognise the activities that challenge other members of the team and actively support them. Supportive work-placements enable learners to develop their interpersonal and employability skills in a secure environment. Welfare and financial advice is available through specialist staff working on the Workstep provision.

## What learners like:

- The extra qualifications and the help to get a job.
- 'It's been fantastic. I've always wanted to come here and do gardening. It has changed my life'
- 'I like everything about Azure. The whole environment and the way things are done'
- The different activities in which learners are involved
- 'The way the tutors help you learn. They do not rush you; you can work at your own pace'

## What learners think could improve:

- 'Some days we seem to do the same thing all the time'